LILITH

SUMMER 1996 THE INDEPENDENT JEWISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINE Vol. 21, No. 2 $4.50

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FRESH NEW FICTION: Three Women on Love, Loss and Men Who Inspire Both

A Medieval Trade-Off for Women: SEX or SCHOLARSHIP?

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WHO ARE THE WOMEN YOU

HONOR Respect
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Be part of LILITH's upcoming four-issue twentieth anniversary celebration by honoring women who have been important in your life (or who are important to you today—"Let's not forget to say our nice words NOW," reminds LILITH board member Natalie Pelavin.

Write up to 25 words in praise of each woman, send your words with a tax-deductible contribution of $100 per honoree, and we will publish your tribute in special sections of the magazine during the anniversary year, from Fall 1996 through Summer 1997. If we receive your tribute by Augu 1, 1996, we will be able to include it in the Fall issue, by November 1 for Winter, by February 1 for Spring and by May 1 for next Summer's LILITH.

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VOLUME 21, NO. 2

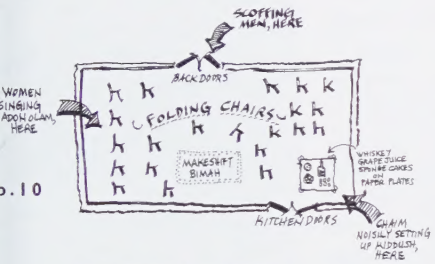
LILITH

SUMMER 1996

Lilith is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam. After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, the Holy One created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilith. Lilith said: "We are equal because we both come from the earth. . . ."
(From *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 23a-b)

10 The Mysteries of Sacred Space

Architects have always known that place can affect our feelings of holiness. Now we have clues about how women's experiences can create a holy space in the cellar of a shul, under a tree, behind a file cabinet, even (despite the objections of men) at the Western Wall.



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Case#1: The Sacred Basement

by Shelly Fredman

A women's group creates a powerful place for prayer in the basement of an Orthodox *shul*, where grown women and little girls change what services look like. Followed by **Cases #2, #3, & #4: Sacred Tree, Sacred Fuse-Box Closet and Sacred Wall.** We're *absolutely* serious.

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by Louise Kehoe

Before Mary Gordon found out that *her* father was Jewish, Louise Kehoe had penetrated her dead father's final legacy—he was no lapsed Romanoff living in rural England, but a tortured shtetl Jew, in disguise. After suffering both his denial and his cruelties, she emerges a Jew too.

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Never mind Charles-and-Di mugs. LILITH finds a ceramicist who commemorates what really matters in life, with plates for your sideboard marking the grand occasions of getting a grant or finding a comfortable bra.

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by Nancy Reisman

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Cover: From *The Book of Mechtilde* (Asphodel Press), created by Anna Ruth Henriques. Born in Jamaica, part Jewish, African, Asian, Portuguese, Henriques was educated at Catholic schools but raised as a Jew. Here, an excerpt from her illustrated manuscript based on the Book of Job. Mixing imagery and text, she has created a loving narrative of the life of her mother, Mechtilde, who died after a nine-year bout with cancer.

FROM THE EDITOR

A Plea for Pictures

A photograph from my childhood surfaced in my memories vividly today. I'm sitting at the very center of a long sofa, surrounded by relatives. I'm about 4 and the next oldest person is my 17-year-old brother, Martin. The rest of the cast, all looking at me, include parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles. (It was a very long sofa.) That photo remains, both in my album and in my mind, as an icon of the family dynamics, a visual representation of the family structure and a vivid documentation of the fact that I was a) the youngest and b) under observation.

When I was an adult, my mother often added as a coda to a conversation about family *simchas*—"and make sure you take pictures." She herself regretted having only one or two formal portraits of marker events. And, now that I think of it, that photograph on the sofa may be the only one of my parents, grandparents, Martin and me all together—this despite the fact that we lived only a block away from Bobbe and Zayde and saw them every day.

That photo, and my mother's belated longing for photographic documentation, came to mind as we were editing this issue of LILITH. The article about sacred spaces began with the story of a women's prayer group. We call the author, Shelly Fredman, to ask if there are photos of the women from any activities during the now almost 20-year history of the group. We want to see them in their flowered dresses. We want to see the little girls running around in the basement space while their mothers davened. There are, she tells us, no photos. We understand that photography is not permitted on Shabbat, but how about a baby-naming ceremony? Rosh Hodesh? Reading the *megilah* at Purim? Nothing? Nothing.

I call women active in other women's prayer groups around the country—some meeting for a decade or more—and get the same answer. Ruth Shulman, in Princeton, says, "It's amazing to realize this, but we just don't have any. Maybe we should start taking pictures now. All those years and no evidence!" Hence this plea. Very few are the visual images we possess to document the dramatic changes in Jewish women's lives over the past 20 years. The few stand out in my mind the way that sofa photo does, capturing a moment that tells us some things we need to know, retrospectively. The startle I still recollect and sometimes still feel when I see the late Gail Rubin's photograph of a woman praying wearing *tfillin*, which appeared in LILITH's premier issue. A photograph Marilynne Herbert took at an early LILITH editorial meeting, gleeful faces in a sun-drenched living room. Bill Aron's images of outdoor services with a woman and man wound in the same big *tallit*. These are icons of their times—and ours. We need more.

We need to document the work that we do (and the fun, too). We send children off to camp or on an Israel trip with a camera. We pay hefty sums to videotape weddings and other large-scale events. But we only infrequently remember that valuing our own activities should include photographing them, too.

As LILITH begins its third decade (the magazine starts twentieth anniversary celebrations in the Fall issue, and we'll be bringing you anniversary essays for a full year), please remember that we are all making history —even if we don't know it at the time. Comb your own files, and send us photographs of occasions that represent to you some of the changes women have made in Jewish life—and in our own lives—over the past 20 years, so that we can publish some of them here and remind ourselves (while demonstrating to others) that the world looked different *before*.

Susan Weidman Schneider

YOU AND YOUR NAME

Do you have an interesting relationship with your own name? Is your surname your father's, mother's, partner's, made up? Is your first name Hebrew, Yiddish, English, made up? Do you have different names for different occasions? Do hyphens run in your family? For a LILITH article on Jewish women's struggles with our names (and the names we've sometimes inflicted on others, notably children), drop us a line with your story.

See page 39 for another LILITH project.

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LETTERS

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EAKING OF WOMEN

your piece on the Lions of ah (Winter '95-'96): I think missed a golden opportunity comment on the fact that the A and Federation Women's ision events (including the men's Institute at the annual neral Assembly) invariably e men as their keynote akers at major meetings h as the one you described her than inviting women. e other women's organiza- s (e.g. Hadassah) they also men higher fees than they r women.

In the context of what you are ng to try and raise women's sciousness regarding the need devote their philanthropic rts to helping women, this is ssue that should be addressed.

Alice Shalvi
Jerusalem, Israel

FEMINIST CRITIQUE THE PRIMACY OF OUPLEHOOD

s is in response to LILITH's ent coverage of issues around ish lesbian and gay marriage emonies [Spring 1996]. This e, Hawaii is expected to ome the first state to legalize ian and gay marriage. Anti- ating this, state legislatures in er parts of the country have en rushing to deny legal ognition of such marriages.

Feminist analysis of the titution of marriage has ome invisible in the debate, ving many who advocate both feminism and gay rights deeply uncomfortable with the choices we face: either to support lesbian and gay marriage at the expense of our feminist principles or vice versa. For many the issues are much more complicated. Moreover, the stakes of this choice are high: failing to support lesbian and gay marriage will make it easier for states to pass laws which are designed to deny equal rights to lesbians and gay men.

Granting health insurance and other benefits to lesbian and gay couples is a matter of justice. Yet this would benefit only a small portion of the lesbian and gay community—those who are gainfully employed, property-owning members of long-term relationships. In other words, legalizing lesbian and gay marriage will profit those who need it least. At the same time, it will increase the religious, legal and economic disparities between those who are coupled and those who are not. Legalizing marriage will create two different classes of lesbians and gay men in Jewish and American life: those who are accepted because they conform to ideals of middle class heterosexual family life and those who are further margin-alized because they challenge these ideals by choice or coincidence.

If supporters of lesbian and gay rights are truly interested in welcoming us into the mainstream of Jewish and American culture, shouldn't they welcome us as individuals rather than on the basis of our membership in a couple? Shouldn't they welcome us unconditionally, rather than on the condition that we conform to sexist and heterosexist ideals? Shouldn't they work to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, rather than creating new laws which will increase the barriers faced by single people, regardless of their sexual orientation? If our supporters are interested in bringing lesbians and gay men into the economic mainstream, shouldn't they work for measures such as universal health care, rather than for benefits based on marital status? This brings me back to a fundamental feminist question: Shouldn't we struggle for recognition as individuals rather than as part of a marital unit?

I believe the consequences of not supporting lesbian and gay marriage are dangerous: we're liable to end up with a spate of new laws that openly discriminate against lesbians and gay men. For this reason, I'm a reluctant supporter of lesbian and gay marriage. When legislation is introduced in my state, I'll be out there lobbying for it. I'll write to elected officials, circulate petitions, march to the state capitol, and do whatever it takes. But in the meantime, I keep hoping we can come up with a strategy to advance lesbian and gay rights which is compatible with basic feminist insights.

Christie Balka
Philadelphia, PA

ABORTION RIGHTS

I want to respond to LILITH's articles on abortion and abortion rights [Spring 1996] with some statistics. Women are still our society's primary care givers. It is they who will be most negatively affected by legislation that eliminates federal support for programs which, for the past 60 years, have strengthened the family by supporting education and care for children, the infirm and the elderly. They also stand to lose the most if their reproductive independence is jeopardized or if their right to chose whether or not to bring a fetus to term is no longer a legally protected right. The elimination of support for these programs, the abolition of a woman's right to choose, is exactly what the radical right—religious and political—advocates.

In 1992, 55% of all women voting (and more women vote than do men) voted Democrat, a full 10% more than voted Republican. The woman's vote was a significant factor in Clinton's narrow victory. His outspoken support of choice attracted many female voters. On this point, he has justified their faith in him. Yet, in 1994 women stayed away from the polls in droves. That year, the year of the Republican ascendance to power in Congress, 17.4% fewer women voted. Only 44.9% went to the polls, as compared with 62.3% in 1992. Clearly in 1994 women

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surrendered their role as significant players in the political process. Will it happen again in 1996?

Let women, through the power of their ballots, remind candidates that the vast majority of Americans are religiously pro-choice and pro-family and that the Christian Right is fundamentally wrong in its distorted views of human sexuality with which it seems to be obsessed.

This year, to be powerful and effective, women need march no further than to their nearest polling station, there to cast a truly pro-family vote.

Rabbi Balfour Brickner
New York, NY

JEWISH WOMEN/ JEWISH MEN

Paula Hyman, in her review of my book *Jewish Women/ Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life* [Spring '96], launches scatter-shot attacks on my scholarship based on an anti-classic bias and a misrepresentation of many of my views.

Anti-classic bias: Hyman criticizes me incorrectly for quoting mainly from the works of "long-dead scholars" such as Dubnow and Abrahams. Her objection to Dubnow et al—that their works have been "superceded" by modern scholarship—is shocking coming from a noted Jewish historian. I am at a loss to comprehend what specifically in the historical accounts by these historians has been "superceded"—what does not hold up? Even more disquieting is the bias that informs this objection: that one should judge a work on the basis of its newness rather than its excellence—its accuracy and authenticity.

Misrepresentation of my views: I attributed the redefinition of Jewish masculinity to the need to reduce male violence and thereby promote communal unity in the Exile (pp.81-84, 91-92), not, as Hyman wrote, to the men's need to disparage aggression because they could not "protect" their women. I wrote that the woman's being sole family provider was a common pattern in the shtetl (pp.111-112), not that it characterized all women. I defined assimilationism—the strategy of advancing Jewish ethnic invisibility (pp.152,154-157)—and attributed its use by the ruling class to various dynamics obtaining in Modern Western society, not to a "plot" by the "Jewish elite" (a term that never appears anywhere in the book) in "collaboration" with the ruling class. Recognition of the Jewish ambivalence toward sex is implicit in my long discussion of the conflicts around it and their expression in the laws and practices of *niddah* and *mikva* (pp.138-142), a section written three years before I read David Biale's book.

Finally, Hyman charges that my being a "staunch secularist" causes me to dismiss the accomplishments of Jewish feminists and their impact on synagogue and communal life and to believe that the "religious focus of Jewish feminism in America [has] diverted women from making fundamental social change."

Let me set the record straight. First, I am not a "secularist" (staunch or otherwise). Constricting labels such as "secularist" or "clericalist" as well as the various denominational tags cannot possibly describe the complex reality of individual Jewish consciousness today. Basically I am a *Klal Yisrael'nik* who believes that all authentic forms of the expression of Jewish identity should be encouraged.

Second, even if I did identify as a secularist, I harbor no anti-religious bias that could lead me to regard religious reform as a diversion. Rather than dismiss the accomplishments of Jewish feminists in the religious sphere, I value them and devote considerable discussion in the book to the struggle to attain them.

My critique of many Jewish feminists concerns their tunnel-vision preoccupation with writing ritual to the exclusion of other, necessary activities. What I find disappointing is that the 11-year struggle for equal access has not expanded from the religious sphere to the secular sphere (where the real power lies) and that Jewish feminists are content with the (new) status quo rather than passionate about transforming Jewish society. I think it is time that we face the reality that writing ceremonies, rituals, and liturgy will not by itself create the kind of community that will survive and flourish into the 21st century. If expressing this opinion makes me a gadfly rather than a cheerleader, so be it: I wrote *Jewish Women/Jewish Men* to stimulate debate.

Aviva Cantor
New York, NY

Reviewer Paula Hyman responds: As my review of Cantor's book indicated, it is a sprawling and passionate polemic that raises intriguing questions about the nature of Jewish patriarchy. However, Cantor's speculations about the "female values" incorporated in a Jewish "modified patriarchy" and their role in fostering anti-Semitism remain speculations. Because she does not contend seriously with recent scholarship, she provides inadequate historical grounding for her uncontextualized assertions.

I have no bias against classical historiography. But the field of Jewish history has come far from the work of even our greatest predecessors, such as Graetz and Dubnow. A work of history is not a canonized scared book like the Torah. We read classical historians primarily to explore how they understood the past in their own time, not as the major sources for our understanding. On the basis of new archival resources and new interpretive approaches, we understand the past differently from our scholarly forbears. No student of the Renaissance would rely primarily on the great nineteenth-century scholar Jac Burckhardt, and no student Jewish history should re primarily on the sources th Cantor cites on virtually eve page. The works of the mode scholars that Cantor includes her bibliography do not info her reading of the past up which she builds her argume This is my central criticism of t book. Most importantly, s seems unaware of the nuanc and complex interpretation assimilation and the revision the evaluation of assimilationi that has emerged in recent Jew historiography.

I did not misrepres Cantor's view but gave a f examples of problematic sta ments. Her references to t inability of Jewish men to prot Jewish women and th consequent guilt may be fou on pp. 89-90. Women as the s provider was never a comm pattern in the shtetl but a cultu ideal, found among the famil of Talmud scholars. In discussion of assimilationi Cantor refers to a "con game" which "rich Jews" or "upp middle class Jews" "colluc with the ruling classes beca they saw it as in their interest get the masses to try assimilate" (pp.158-159). H discussion of Jewish attitu toward sexuality does not ta into account David Biale's (a others') evidence that sexua was rigidly constrained, and just by the laws of *niddah*.

Whether a secularist or r Cantor remains unjustly d missive of the accomplishme of Jewish feminists. Her cari ture of Jewish feminists as p occupied with writing ritual the exclusion of other activi bears no resemblance to Jewish feminists I know. We active as teachers, scholars our fields, writers, phil thropists, communal activi and, yes, secular leaders. T Jewish feminism has transformed Jewish society not for lack of trying.

"WOMAN'S VOICE." TRADITIONALLY, THE VOICE OF THE JEWISH WOMAN WAS NOT TO BE HEARD IN PUBLIC, LEST IT AROUSE MEN. NO MORE. THESE PAGES ARE MEANT FOR NEWS ABOUT JEWISH WOMEN, IN OUR OWN STRONG VOICES.

Ambiguous "Legacy" at Brown University

from a recent commencement address by Amy Sohn

is January of my sophomore year when realize my grandmother is getting old. She is in the middle stages of zheimer's disease, just beginning to ifuse names, dates and grandchildren, I know that in five years she may not ognize me.

I have just read *Maus: My Father eds History,* and I've been wondering naybe my grandmother bleeds history . I arrive at her apartment with two gs of fruit and a miniature tape order, which I test a few times to ke sure it's recording and set on the le between us.

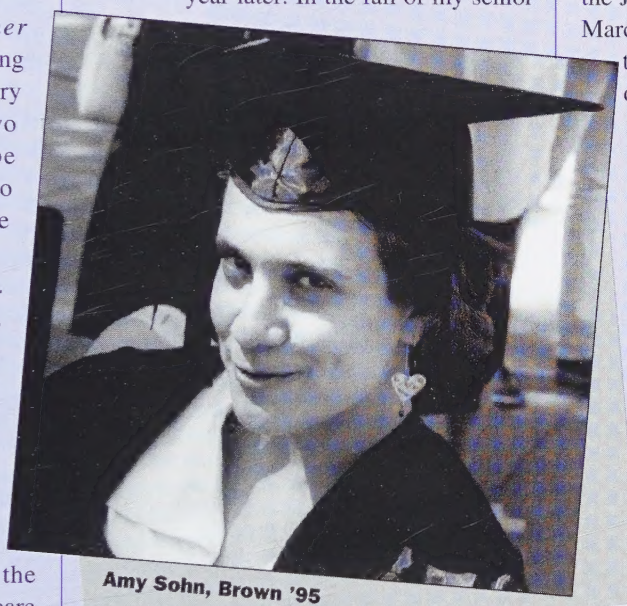
I ask her to tell me her life story. e's not sure what that means. I say, tart with where you were born, ndma," and she says she was born he Ukraine but came to this country a boat when she was five.

She doesn't remember much about childhood, though. She is more ger to talk about her years as a dent at Pembroke College during the nties, because she wants me to compare m with my own experiences at Brown hich incorporated the all-women's nbroke in 1971].

She begins to tell me about her friends at lege and how they would see plays in wntown Providence on the weekends for . I ask her if most of her friends were vish, and she says they were, but that she n't feel any discrimination at Pembroke. en she graduated, though, she found out m some of her classmates that there had n a quota for Jews. She says that this vs upset her but didn't surprise her—ause Jewish quotas were a product of times.

When I have to leave, I kiss her good- and on the elevator ride down I take out tape recorder, excited to hear how her ries came out. It's blank. I am positive I ssed "record," but there is not a thing on the tape. I am infuriated. But I take a deep breath and convince myself that it all makes some sort of cosmic sense that my first attempt to record my grandmother's oral history failed miserably.

My grandmother dies almost exactly a year later. In the fall of my senior year, I decide to write a thesis for my concentration, Public Policy. I want to choose a topic with intense personal significance—and that's not too easy to do in Public Policy. I remember my grandmother's story about the quotas and I write a proposal to study discrimination in Brown admissions against Jewish and Asian Americans.



Amy Sohn, Brown '95

If the tape recorder had worked on that cold January day, I would never have attempted to uncover my family's history at this institution. I learn, through my research, that the policy of legacy preference, giving admissions preference to children of alumni, was developed by 1920s administrators for the purpose of limiting the number of Jewish students. Because nearly all the legacies during that time were children of the Protestant elite, legacy preference served as affirmative action for Protestant applicants.

I also learn that the anti-Semitism of administrators affected my grandmother's experiences at Pembroke. One morning at the John Hay Library, I open her file, dated March 21, 1929. I read what was supposed to be a recommendation for her from one of her professors: "Miss Sohn has some Jewish traits of personality that are not attractive. She is inclined to push in and get as much as she can with the least possible expenditure of effort. There's a sort of efficiency in that, however, which one admires with some exasperation....But she dresses neatly and in good taste. In the right place, she will do excellent work but she should not be recommended for a position...where a Jewess would not be acceptable."

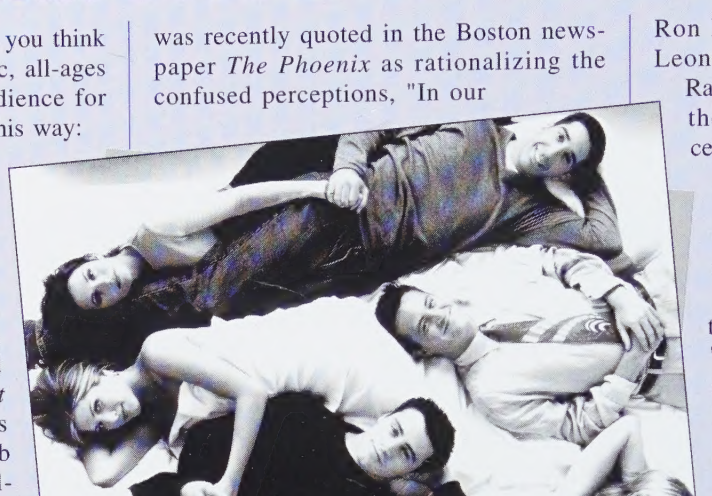
I cannot help but reflect on the irony of reading these words while sitting in my grandmother's favorite library. There is something chillingly odd about my becoming aware of the anti-Semitism of my grandmother's mentors while sitting in the Hay. I am grateful to have the privilege to study in such stunning surroundings. Yet after reading the file, I am suddenly and frighteningly aware that I'm not so sure I want the membership privileges in a club which could have penned such vitriol.

As I continue to uncover my grandmother's history at Brown through my thesis research, I finally begin to confront my shame at my own legacy status. On the one hand, my study of Brown admissions gives me the knowledge to understand the true, anti-Semitic basis for legacy preference. On the other hand, I cannot deny to myself that as a legacy, I am a beneficiary of the system I understand well enough to despise.

Who's Jewish on "Friends"

So, nu? Which "Friend" do you think is Jewish? My unscientific, all-ages sampling of the huge audience for "Friends" uniformly responded this way: "Well, Ross Geller (David Schwimmer) is definitely Jewish, so that would make his sister Monica (Courtney Cox) Jewish." Then what about Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston), Monica's best friend from a Long Island childhood and Ross's long-sought *objet d'amour*? Uniform confusion was the response. This isn't just a stab at Jewish geography or tribal-conspiracy theory. If both Ross and Rachel are Jewish (and, more importantly, *perceived* as Jewish), for as long as their TV relationship lasts they will, therefore, be the first young, sizzling Jewish couple on television. An impressive first, let alone on such a popular sitcom, where the demographics include the impression-able 12-15 set.

Like so many other Jewish sitcom writers, creators David Crane and Marta Kauffman, buddies from their Brandeis days, backpedal from having their characters perceived as too Jewish. Crane was recently quoted in the Boston newspaper *The Phoenix* as rationalizing the confused perceptions, "In our minds, the back story is that Ross is half-Jewish because Elliott Gould (as Ross's father) is, and Christina Pickles (as Ross's mother) sure isn't. So he and Monica are half-Jewish. And I suppose Rachel is Jewish, though that's not an aspect we've done much with. Now her mom's Marlo Thomas. We'll see who we end up casting as her dad, and that will give us a better clue."



Ron Leibman was cast as her dad, L
Leonard Green, seeming to clarify t
Rachel too is "half-Jewish," though, l
the Geller siblings, she yearns
celebrate a traditional family Christm
The ambiguous entrails of the sh
can be further picked apart
contrary indications: wasn't tha
mezuzah at Ross's parents' front doo
Virtually half of all TV watchers
the country are glued to NBC watchi
"Friends" every Thursday night. Cc
it be something other than Monica
Rachel's possibly non-Jewish moth
that keeps viewers from perceiv
them as Jewish women? Are th
women too thin, too sexy, and
struggling in their nondescr
professions to be considered Jewi
Quick, how many actresses play
Jewish women can you name who
posed nude on the cover of Rolling Sto
as Aniston did?

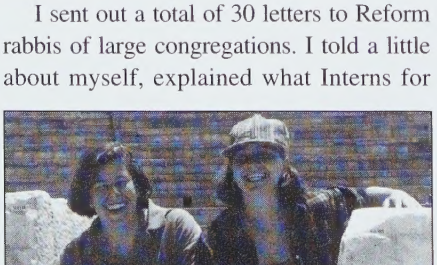
At a time when more and more wor
writers/producers--particularly Jew
women--are getting a chance to show h
successful they can be, we are bar
creeping closer to breaching the last ta
on television--an appealing Jewish cou
who are more than just "Friends."

—Nora Lee Mar

A LILITH "How To": Raising Money To Get To Israel

When faced with the problem of needing money for travel to Israel recently (I was to work for two years with Interns for Peace), I couldn't obtain funding through any of the major Jewish organizations I called. Then the Hillel Director at my college had a suggestion: "Write to rabbis and ask for money from their discretionary funds." Almost every congregational rabbi has such a kitty, he told me.

I sent out a total of 30 letters to Reform rabbis of large congregations. I told a little about myself, explained what Interns for Peace is, and why I needed money to go. I said that I value Reform Judaism's stress on social action and *tikkun olam*, and that this program in Israel is my personal *tikkun olam* project. I stated how much I was trying to raise, and that any size donation would be helpful. I also offered to write for Temple newsletters, and/or speak at the synagogues upon my return in exchange for "sponsorship" (most rabbis said this was not really necessary since the money was coming out of their discretionary funds, but many still wished to be kept informed about what I'll be doing). I also included a recent résumé and my letter of acceptance to Interns for Peace. I followed up each letter with a phone call about three weeks later.



Enid (on right) in Israel at Caesarea.

Of the rabbis I approached, only about one third said they had no funding to give me. The synagogue did not have a discretionary fund, or money from the fund was for congregants and in-city projects only, or, in a couple of cases, the rabbis simply had no interest. From the remainin
rabbis, I got pledges between $25-$1000.
have actually received $2675, only $42
less than I said my goal was, and it i
possible that I may still reach that goal.

Since I began my fundraising effort
I've received suggestions to improve th
process. I pass them along:

1) Include a couple of letters of referenc
to give the reader a better sense o
your legitimacy.
2) Let the rabbis know of your ow
personal contribution, for exampl
if you've been working and savin
money.
3) Explain that you have already exhauste
all other resources you know of, and a
for suggestions as well as money.

—Enid Scha

*[Editor's Note: One place young wome
may obtain funding for Israel-relate
projects is the Amy Adina Schulma
Memorial Fund, 124 Snowden Lan
Princeton, NJ, 08540.]*

On the Jerusalem bus at 7 am: "Where is our peace?"

The bomb attacks in Jerusalem and Ashkelon confirmed in the fullest sense what Professor Shlomo ben Ami said on Friday: there is a class of people for whom the peace process goes right over their heads—and they therefore feel no personal stake in it.

The economic privatization we are undergoing carries no guarantee for social justice, no medical conscience or care for those in distress. It has no social obligation or solidarity with the social strata that are called weak. We are told: when peace comes the regional economy will boom, and everyone's situation will improve—and this is probably right. But this statement does not alleviate the feeling that, in fact, at this time, no one really cares, and that until the sun rises, one's soul could expire.

After the signing of the peace accord between Israel and Egypt euphoria reigned in Cairo. Egyptians were convinced that from now on they would come in droves to work in Israel. This hope was not fulfilled. We witnessed a wave of disappointment in the peace which was seen by many as a peace between leaders only. The Egyptian Minister of Agriculture could show with pride the accomplishment of agriculture in his country since the arrival of Israeli consultants: but the peace still has a long way to go to arrive at the doorstep of the people. The same sense of peace-between leaders exists in more than a few strata as well in Jordan: beside those Jordanians who come and fill our shopping malls there are many who cannot afford the prices of the mall in Malcha or the hotel in Tel Aviv. In their eyes, the peace is a rich man's peace.

And among ourselves—when 50% of our salaried workers don't even reach the lowest tax bracket and the social welfare system appears at times to be drowning in a sea of problems, why should the issue

Israeli novelist Shulamith Hareven's latest collection of fiction is *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy* (Mercury House, 1996)

of peace be central to a distressed family whose situation has not improved, sometimes for three generations? Why would they be comforted by a promise for the long range, when in the short range it seems impossible to finish out the month or buy a child a new pair of shoes?

And here we should be reminded: these are exactly the people who are riding the buses before seven o'clock in the morning. When we speak of Jerusalem, terror hits the people: that's how it was in the bombing at the Mahane Yehuda market, and that's how it was yesterday on bus 18 [on February 25 and again on March 3] They certainly feel that they are not protected: not economically, not socially, and not in terms of their personal security. Those who own their own cars seem to be better protected.

Pursuing the present peace process is the most right thing for us to do. In this writer's opinion, there is no substitute for the leadership of Shimon Peres on the entire political front. But the Labor Party will make the mistake of its life, and not only because of coming elections, if it neglects the unprotected stratum, that earns less than the average salary in our economy, that rides the bus to the central station in the early morning hours, for whom the gap between themselves and the upper tenth is only becoming greater with all the touted "growth"—a gap that is now one of the largest in the world. The peace must not be seen as a peace of industrialists and yuppies; it must not be seen as a peace between people in suits who have Philippine maids, on the backs of, and over the heads of those who are referred to too clinically as the "lower tenth percentiles"—in simple Hebrew, the have-nots."

—Shulamith Hareven
in Yediot Aharonot
translated by Naomi Danis

Breast Cancer: The Tough Cure for Racism?

Sisterhood is powerful, but not always powerful enough to unite women across race and class lines. The life-reatening reality of breast cancer may be inging women together in a way that no ner issue has.

Proof positive? The contingents of rican-American women from Harlem and ooklyn marching alongside Manhattan tina women and thousands of white, tive-born New York women in last ctober's SHARE-a-walk. This four-mile ow of solidarity is the annual visibility and nd-raising day for SHARE, the New York ty self-help organization started in 1976 for women with breast or ovarian cancer.

Not that breast cancer support groups pull women together like iron filings to a magnet. SHARE's leaders—all of them survivors of breast cancer and many of them Jewish—say the organization has worked very hard in the past five years to reach women of color. Few African-American or Latina women felt comfortable coming to SHARE's mid-town Manhattan office, so SHARE went to them.

Executive director Alice Yaker, 54, Jewish, a politically active lawyer, praises the organization's self-help model: "Everyone's a participant and a developer." The groups give people with breast or ovarian cancer the emotional support of other women going through the same thing—a buddy to phone at two in the morning, or help with medical insurance problems. The goal is empowering each member to take charge of her life and then to help other women.

Yaker came to SHARE five years ago when she joined a support group for women newly diagnosed with breast cancer. An advocate for reaching women across race and class, she sees SHARE's black, Latina and white women getting involved "both separately and melded." She estimates that more than 6,000 women attend SHARE

groups each year; SHARE's English and Spanish hotlines get some 5,000 calls annually. SHARE made a special effort to include African-American and Latina women in their delegation to a recent National Breast Cancer Coalition conference in Washington. Participants, among them Latina women speaking through an interpreter, lobbied for more federal funds for breast cancer research.

The basic SHARE model is to bring women newly diagnosed with breast cancer into self-help groups for six weeks. After that they may join more narrowly defined groups—for young women, women with children, older women, lesbians, women whose breast cancer has metastacized. Harlem SHARE and the Latina groups have followed a different route; the same group members stay together for years. Bella August, project coordinator for Latina SHARE, explains: "Lots of the Latina women don't have a support group outside of SHARE. They don't speak much English, and for some women it's practically the only time they leave the house."

In contrast, many of the African-American women are professional women whose SHARE groups socialize together and hold fund-raising events and retreats. August, 58, white, Jewish, and married to an African-American, sees herself as "a bridge." She joined SHARE when she was diagnosed with breast cancer nine years ago.

Trained as a psychotherapist and soc worker, she says, "Racism and cla differences don't disappear just because person has breast cancer. White women m interrupt or ignore each other when they talking. No big deal. But when they do t same thing to an African-American or Lati woman, she may experience it as racism."

Meanwhile, D.G. Wilson, 45, a se described "very strong black woman" w joined Harlem SHARE three years ago a now oversees SHARE's outreach, sa "Even though it's a very racist society and it is—when you come through th door, racism takes a back seat." *[SHAR 1501 Broadway, Suite 1720, New York, 10036 (212)719-0364]* —*Amy Sto*

JEWISH WOMEN AND BREAST CANCER—We're in "A Purgatorial Period"

Since LILITH's last major report on breast cancer ["How Risky Is It to Be Jewish?", Spring1994], geneticists have found that Jewish women of Ashkenazi (eastern European) descent are significantly more likely than other women to carry either one of two newly discovered breast cancer genes (BRCA-1 and -2). These much-publicized findings have triggered enormous anxiety, as Jewish women try to navigate the uncharted waters of testing and diagnosis.

Mary-Claire King, a pioneering molecular geneticist at the University of Washington responsible for isolating and identifying the gene known as BRCA-1, declares that we are living now in "a purgatorial period." She says, "We can calculate what the statistical risks are, but we cannot determine whether or not the disease will begin. Nor is there any prevention or cure--short of having both your breasts and your ovaries surgically removed."

Responding to the confusion, American Jewish Congress's Commission for Women's Equality recently hosted in New York the "First Leadership Conference on Jewish Women's Health Issues," a stellar day-long gathering on "Understanding the Genetics of Breast Cancer: Implications for Treatment, Policy and Advocacy."

The program was praiseworthy for: the quality of the information presented, the fact that the presenters included geneticists actually working on the mutations known as BRCA-1 and BRCA-2, the presence in the audience of scientists drawn by the outstanding program, and, finally, the fact that the women who addressed the gathering spoke both with authority and with feeling. King, for example, "speaking as a woman," noted that women worried about breast cancer suffered at the hands of "a patronizing medical and bio-ethics establishment (of which I am a part), opportunistic businesses, and a malevolent insurance industry."

Beginning with the genetics, renowned molecular biologist Maxine F. Singer reminded the audience that most people who develop breast cancer (including Jews) have normal genes. Less than 10% of all breast cancer cases are inherited. And while people with the gene have a susceptibility to breast or ovarian cancer, not all who carry the gene will get the disease.

So *are* Jewish women at increasing risk for breast cancer? Mary-Claire King tells the conference, "I think not. There is the same rate of breast cancer in Jewish women as with all American women--women with a good [i.e., plentiful] diet, early onset of menstruation and a late first pregnancy. Being Jewish does not predispose one to breast cancer for genetic reasons."

Why does the gene mutation for breast cancer show up more frequently in Jews? "Jewish women are where the mutations appear in their most coherent form," says King, because of "the cultural history of this group in America" [the relative cohesiveness of the Jewish gene pool].

An extensive family history of breast cancer dictates who should be tested for the breast cancer genes. But the greatest danger from the simple blood test may be the risk having the results known by others--w one speaker termed the "genetic discri nation." For example, insurance compan can ask for a family history before det mining whether to pay a claim. "We mi ask if a genetic test was ever done in past; we just wouldn't ask you to do it no said Stephanie W. Kanwit, an attorney w Aetna Life Insurance Co. "Insurance cc panies just want a level playing fiel Which means they do not support legislat proposed in several states which would allow questions about the results of gen testing in determining insurance awards.

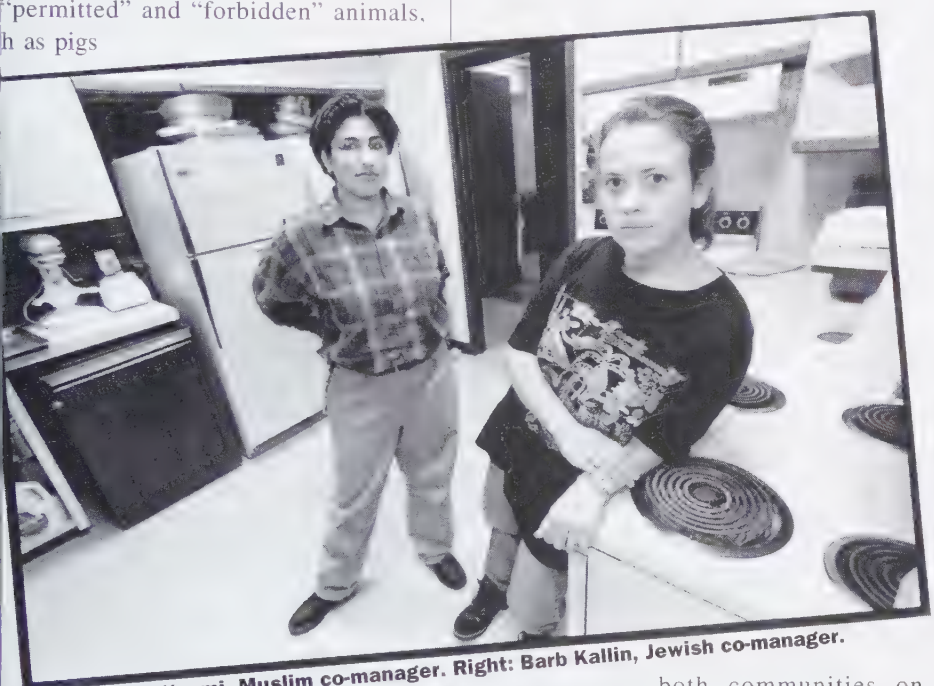
Until there are legal safeguards aga such discrimination, said Karen Rothenb Professor of Law at the University Maryland Law School, some women w not get tested for fear that they or th families will, as a result, be denied insura coverage. Part of the conundrum is t even without asking explicitly for t results, insurance carriers can still ask ab family history, an oblique way of gettin genetic data. Even if results fr screenings conducted by the Natio Institutes of Health (N.I.H.) rem confidential, and the N.I.H. won't tell, i insurance company asks you for the resu *you*'ll know the answer.

Insurance companies aren't the only guys. Private hospitals and clinics h stepped up their pitches to test Jew women for the breast cancer genes. S testing may not be accurate, war scientists, plus little or no genetic counse may be offered, and no guarantee confidentiality. If you want to be tested, Richard Klausner, head of the Natio Cancer Institute of the N.I.H., make sure

Jews and Muslims at Mount Holyoke

The Kosher/Hallal Kitchen at Mount Holyoke Women's College, known on campus as the K/HK, has its origins in onversation that took place between dents in 1987. Two women, one Jewish l one Muslim, were standing in line at the ing hall, complaining about all the food y couldn't eat, when they suddenly lized their respective dietary laws were y similar. (Both traditions have a concept "permitted" and "forbidden" animals, h as pigs and birds of y, and both share a notion of ritual ughter. Notable differences are that wine orbidden for Muslims, while mixing dairy l meat is permitted.) The two students, ng with Reverend Janet Cooper-Nelson en Protestant Chaplain at Mount lyoke), and Rabbi Carolyn Braun, worked together with the full support of the MHC Dining Services and administration to create a unique program which opened in 1989: the Kosher/Hallal Kitchen located at the Center for Interreligious activities.

The Kitchen Program is run by two student co-managers—one Jewish woman and one Muslim woman—who work together to fulfill various responsibilities, one of which is to create a menu that appeals to both communities on campus. Working closely with the kitchen chef, they plan kosher/hallal meals for weekly Wednesday dinners, every other week Shabbat dinners, and special meals for holiday observances such as Passover, Iftar (the breaking of the daily fast during Ramadan) and Id (the celebration at the end of Ramadan).



Left: Ayesha Kazmi, Muslim co-manager. Right: Barb Kallin, Jewish co-manager.

The two managers also create and organize a weekly series of educational programs that accompany the Wednesday night dinners to help foster dialogue between the Muslim and Jewish communities. These programs also help to educate other Mount Holyoke women about various cultural and religious aspects of Judaism and Islam, and issues and concerns that affect both Jews and Muslims. Some topics that have been discussed in the K/HK in the past year: "Twice Blessed? Being Jewish/Muslim and Being Lesbian;" "Palestinian Elections on the West Bank and Gaza: Prelude to a Palestinian State?" "The Music of Nusrat: Islamic Devotional Sonnets" and "The First Annual Latke-Hamentashen Debate."

Barb Kallin, the Jewish student co-manager, says that "The Kosher/Hallal Kitchen has allowed me to talk to and learn from other women who are, I've found, as similar to me as they are different. I think learning about each others lives and cultures is more important now than ever. It's been wonderful to see just how many people have come to take part in the discussions, to listen, and of course to eat!"

The Kosher/Hallal dinners provide a welcoming, warm, and comfortable environment for students, faculty and staff on campus. As a senior, I am going to greatly miss the K/HK, it was really a second home for me and I know for many other students. The K/HK is much more than just a place to observe similar dietary laws: it brings together two communities that share rich cultures.

—Sharon Kaufman with Rabbi Devorah Jacobson

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a facility that is participating in the large-le N.I.H. protocols. To find a site near a, call 1-800-4 CANCER (422-6237).

Since the connection between carrying gene and getting the disease is truly known, why be tested at all? A personal efit would be, for example, if you have l a family history of breast cancer and nd out you were not carrying the genetic tation, you might spare yourself nsiderable anguish and possibly ecessary prophylactic surgery. Another son to be tested is purely altruistic: since nkenazi Jewish women constitute a very ful genetic pool, women of this background could offer themselves as guinea pigs, as several thousand have done, anonymously, in Washington, D.C. The advantage, scientifically, is that previous large-scale genetic screening has been done with women who were already in a high risk group--part of a family with four or more women with breast cancer.

Mary-Claire King suggests that a population-genetics approach would be to screen Jewish women for the gene and then see--"who of the women who carry the mutation actually get cancer. We need to compare women carrying BRCA-1 who do get cancer with women in their families who don't get cancer, and then ask questions about their lives to see what factors might be environmental."

For excellent background (and foreground) information about the medical, ethical and legal issues now swirling around the issue of genetic testing for breast cancer, order the materials distributed to conference participants, including a fact sheet from the N.I.H. on BRCA1 entitled "What Does This Mean for Jewish Women?" Send $12 to Lois Waldman, American Jewish Congress Commission for Women's Equality, 15 East 84 St., New York NY 10028.

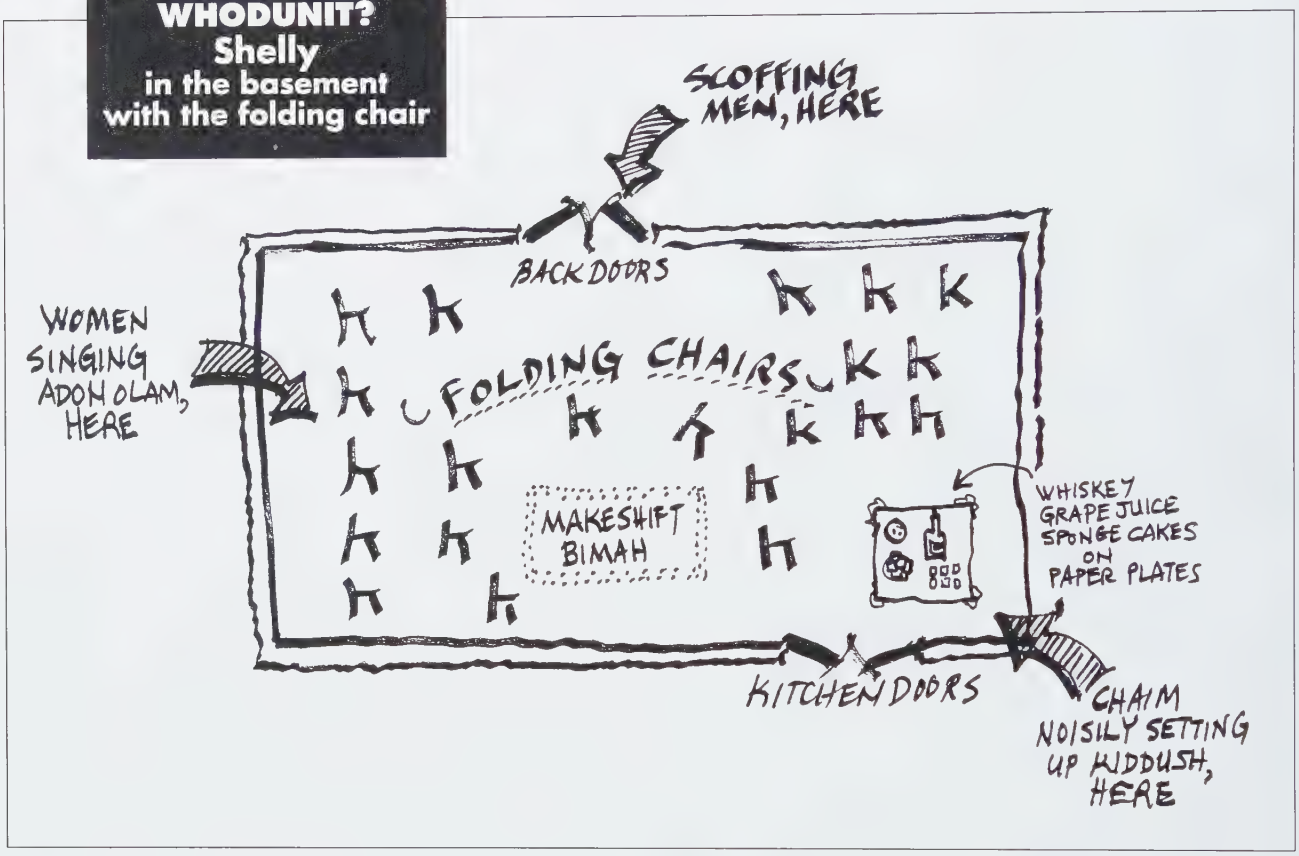
--Susan Weidman Schneider

PARADOXES AND MYSTERIES OF SACRED SPACE

Case #1 Sacred Basement

by Shelly Fredman

WHODUNIT?
Shelly
in the basement
with the folding chair



ILLUSTRATIONS BY GIL OBERFELD

I am searching for that primordial Torah, the one the mystics speak of, the one written with black fire on white fire that rested on God's knee. I imagine God consulting it, just before Creation, as a woman might consult a cookbook, her index finger moving along from line to line, adding in stars and trees and mountains to the recipe of the world.

The problem is, I have only just begun to see God this way, and she—this kitchen God at home in clouds of flour and the stinging smell of yeast—has not yet made it into the Torah of paper and ink that I hold in my hands.

Her voice and spirit have trailed me, though, especially in the past ten years, when I have made my way back to a traditional Judaism my parents rejected. Raised on Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, I could not help noticing the gaps in the biblical tales, the small role women played within the Torah and within the life of my Orthodox shul.

One year, just after Simchat Torah, when our rabbi at Young Israel told us once again that we women could not have a Torah to dance with, I began to read the non-prescribed books—those by Judith Plaskow, Susannah Heschel, E. M. Broner, Ellen Umansky, to name but a few. At the same time, one of my best friends, Sharon, fed up with the rigidity of our shul and the increasing talk there of

kol isha, quit and joined another Orthodox shul. [*Kol isha* is the tenet that women's voices are inherently seductive, and therefore are forbidden for men to hear.]

I followed Sharon to this new shul, Bais Abraham. One year and many hushed conversations later, through the work of myself and a handful of other women, the Bais Abraham Women's *Tefillah* [prayer] Group was born.

Although a network of women's *tefillah* groups had formed across the country in response to the desire of traditional women to take part in communal prayer, the formation of our group set off many brushfires in the St. Louis Orthodox community. We endured a tension-filled meeting with the Chief Rabbi of the Orthodox community, in the dark, wood-paneled study of his home. The Rabbinical Council met and debated our existence, and threatened to kick Bais Abraham out of the Council, though they never took any formal action. We were even the subject of a Purim skit at Agudas Israel (the ultra-Orthodox shul), referred to in their ridiculous script as the "Bais Babes."

None of this mattered, though, as I stood outside my house on the morning of the first *tefillah* group service, waiting for the two women who would make the 45-minute trek to Bais Abraham with me. Walking east towards the shul, we felt so giddy and exultant we were sure that—if only we wanted—our path could take us all the way to Jerusalem.

They didn't understand that the basement—women *davening* separately from men—was exhilarating.

At Bais Abraham, my Israeli friend Semadar was waiting for me in the last row of folding chairs, making me think of a school child hiding out at the back of a bus. Semadar had told me she had "no need" of a women's *tefillah* group, and was only there to support the rest of us. Interestingly, my non-Orthodox friends had also been skeptical about the need for such a group. Why be content with basement *davening*, they asked me, when you could find Reform and Conservative egalitarian services with equal access for all? But I had been involved in such services years ago, I told them, and now I wanted something more. I sensed female spirituality was fundamentally different from either male or coed spirituality—and a women's *tefillah* service was the one place I could begin to explore this.

I wanted to pray in the company of women. That seemed to be the only way to begin healing the damage, dispersing the anger, setting aright the imbalance of the past 5000 years.

Semadar, unwilling participant that she was, still flashed me a radiant smile as I took my seat beside her. Twelve of us had made it to shul by 9:00 a.m. for this first service. We listened as woman after woman approached the *bimah*, and was given an *aliyah*, or chanted a portion of the Torah. A student from the local university had joined us, and she sang in a surprisingly beautiful soprano that even Semadar couldn't fail to be moved by.

Ronni, one of the founders of our group, who came to us via Berkeley, Israel, and Canada, sang in a deep, Sephardic voice. She chanted the longest portion without a hint of struggle, instantly declaring herself our leader.

Sharon, serving as *gabbai*, wore a maroon dress strewn with tiny flowers that flowed all the way to the floor. A mass of curls tumbled beneath her floppy hat as she moved around the *bimah*, making certain that people stood in the correct places, whispering to let them know when to begin the blessings. What a difference from the suits and ties, the stiff posturings of the male *gabbaim* at my old shul.

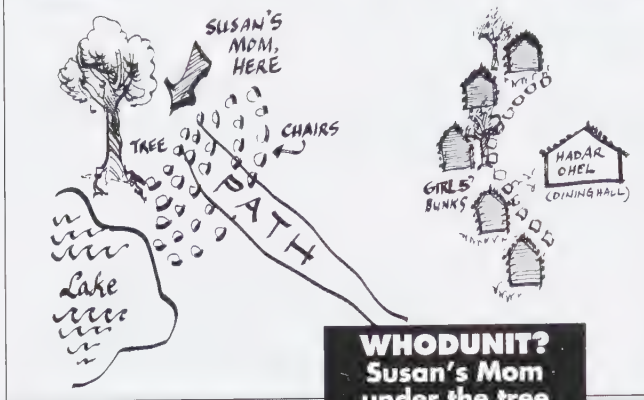
Each woman who approached the Torah scroll was introduced by Sharon. I kept hearing *Ronni bat...Shoshana bat...Esther bat....*The names floated off into the dusty air, but the "*bat*"—"daughter of"—resounded again and again, a layering of invisible daughters forming around us, as if all the generations of women who had not been called to the Torah were standing here, at our sides.

We had never rehearsed the service, so there was a good deal of stopping and starting, corrections made as we went along. It was not smooth, this first service, but it was ours. There had only been a dozen of us gathered when we began, but by mid-service we numbered over thirty and the room was alive with color and movement. Little girls skipped up and down the aisle across the gray-tiled floor, their patent leather shoes clopping out a cadence at odds with our lilting sopranos.

A few white-haired women with pinched faces whispered among themselves in one of the last rows. I imagine they had gone up to the first floor, where the sanctuary was, only to find the women's side nearly deserted. I much preferred this dank basement social hall, where women were singing out loud, to the stained glass and velvet silence upstairs.

Occasionally, as Sharon read, she would forget a women's Hebrew name and Fawn would whisper it to her, their heads bending together, hair falling forward. They smiled sympathetically, or squeezed the hand of a reader who had stumbled. There was a nurturing, cooperative spirit here, one I had been hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the Jewish world, for all its talk of "community."

Case #2
SACRED TREE



WHODUNIT?
Susan's Mom under the tree with a *madeleine*

In the summer of 1961 my mother drove me to Camp Ramah in the Poconos. While I unpacked in my new bunk, she explored the grounds—the beautiful lake, several leafy groves, rustic clapboard bungalows. In the 1920's my mother had briefly gone to a sleep-away camp that she'd loved—Camp Tabor. But a polio epidemic had broken out and her father had to retrieve her after only a few weeks.

The second time my mother visited me at Ramah she arrived mid-week and stayed through Shabbos. On Friday at dusk the whole camp, dressed in white, descended across a grassy meadow to a huge canopied tree under which we prayed.

As we began singing the spectacularly pretty Friday evening psalms—Lechu n'ranenah ("Come sing in ecstasy")—my mother gasped and grabbed my arm. "I've been here," she said. "I've been under this tree, I've prayed under this tree."

The rest of the night we asked everyone whether a camp called Tabor had ever existed on this site; no one knew. A few weeks later, however, I picked up my fork in the dining hall and noticed a worn-down engraving on the handle. I can still see it: CAMP TABOR.

Not all memories are written on index cards in neat files in our heads. Some memories, indeed, are more like pennies shook out of a piggy bank: a split-second alignment of slit and coin, of scent and weather, of place and private feeling. These pairings dislodge from a dark place a forgotten genie.

Though my mother had strolled, while visiting me at Ramah, down lanes of hoary trees and hedgerows, past weathered cottages and derelict out-buildings, though she had canoed to Camp Tioga at the far side of the lake (a camp which, we found out later, had definitely existed in the 1920's) and many times passed the "Shabbos tree" mid-week—none of this had safecracked memory.

The genius loci of a place exists at some geomancer's boundary between Proust and the cosmic surveying tools of feng-shui. Time opens up at this boundary, and a religious feeling ties memory and site, is infused with our presence, with beauty, with our contentment. Sacred trees exist in all traditions—the oak, the neem, the evergreen, the domim, the banyan, the sequoia, the mangrove, the birch, the baobob. And trees form social spaces too—shady canopies under which we sing, tell stories, pray, feel the sun go down or the wind freshen. Contexts have meaning; and meaning, memory. Only when my mother heard praying did her tree shake out its cathected context.

—Susan Schnur

It was a great contrast to the atmosphere at my old shul, the men's shul; for I suddenly felt, in a new way, that's what it *was*. Although the prayer had been impassioned, there was also a rigid formality, in which correctness of pronunciation was more important than feeling. But here we were free to run and stumble, "mothering" each other's spirits. In the world outside this room, a world created mostly by men, threads of competition danced between us, barely noticeable. But here I felt the threads dissolve, left behind at the double doors.

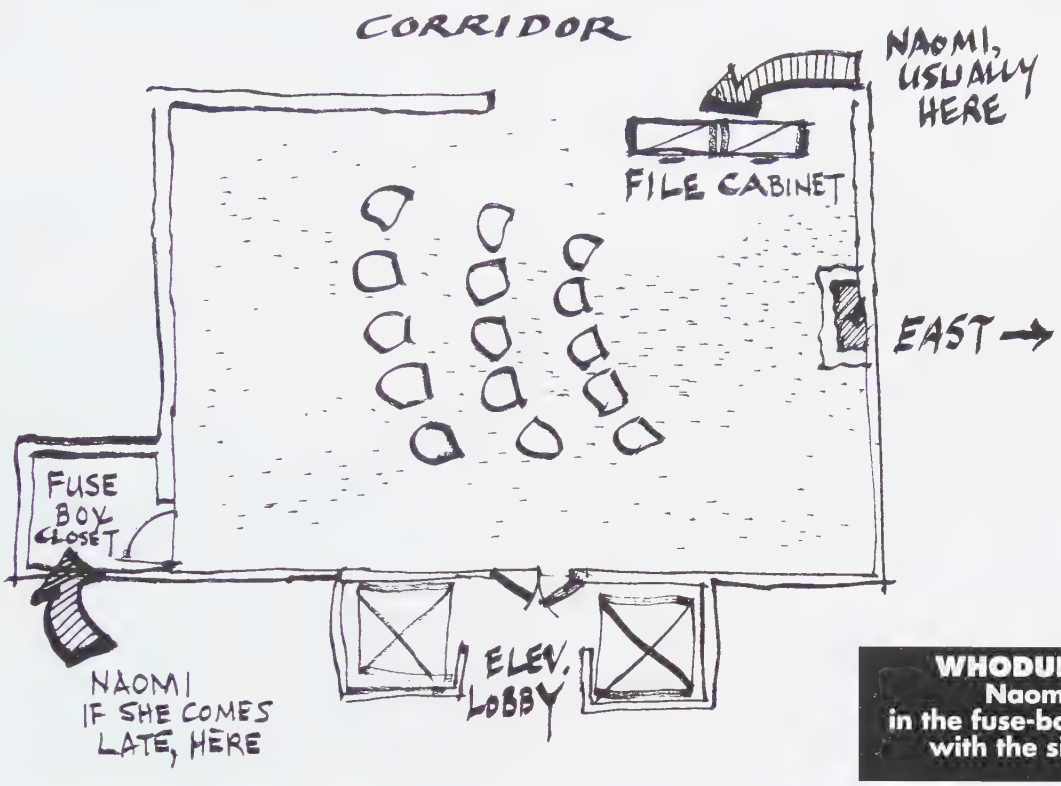
It is hard to describe what I felt, as if we have not yet invented the language to name the experience. In that room full of women praying, I thought of wombs and waters, gardens and kitchens, schoolgirls walking home arm-in-arm. I was reminded of that narrow window of girlhood when we just begin to see ourselves as separate from our mothers, just before we discover guys, and somehow, end up losing ourselves.

Chaim entered to set up a *kiddush* while we were still singing, his anger palpable.

When it was time for me to do my part, wrapping the Torah, I moved to the front of the room, my legs shaking. Phyllis whispered, telling me how to wrap the scrolls. I placed the velvet cover over the parchment, thinking of the rabbi at Young Israel, the same one who said women cannot touch the Torah, who had taught me that the hiddenness of the cloth-covered writings echoes the hiddenness of God. Rabbi Bienfeld had said the Torah has no punctuation, no vowels because all of the writings are just one long name for God.

Phyllis picked up the Torah, placing it in my arms. It was so heavy! My shoulders cupped against its weight. Phyllis showed me how to lean it against one of my shoulders, letting it rest there, my arms wrapped around it. This feeling was familiar, like holding a child. Why hadn't any of the dozen rabbis I had studied with in the last decade ever mentioned this to me? This was the untapped gold mine, a well bubbling up beneath us all of us women on the *bimah*, if only we were willing to enter it. A woman's place within the tradition, a sacred garden lying in wait, just beyond the wall. I was glowing and exultant; my feet barely touched the ground.

Case #3
SACRED FUSE-BOX CLOSET



WHODUNIT?
Naomi in the fuse-box closet with the siddur

When my father died, I decided I was going to continue saying Kaddish once a day for the traditional eleven months and one day. By chance, a "Minha map" appeared in the mail at work from Agudat Yisrael, an Orthodox organization, showing offices all over Manhattan where a *davener* could find a lunch-time minyan. I'm a Conservative Jew, not Orthodox, but this minyan was my most practical option.

The map listed an accountant's office on 59th street (a block or two from where I work). I called up and asked if I could *daven* there, and they said that was okay, they would arrange a place for me behind the filing cabinet.

The first time I went, all these businessmen got off the elevator within a minute or two of each other, *davened* a speedy 15-minute Minha, and then bang, were back at the elevators (it's the middle of the work day for everyone). No one said Kaddish, so I went out to the elevators after the men and I said, "Isn't anybody saying Kaddish here?" and they said, "No." So I said, "Well, I'm saying Kaddish," and one of them goes, "That's interesting," and I almost cried. Another one says, "You need to tell one of us that you're saying Kaddish, and then we'll say it, and you can say it along."

So I went to this minyan five days a week for the year. I dressed modestly so I wouldn't offend them. I think I wore skirts the whole time—which now seems unbelievable to me since I generally wear pants to work. One day I get to the minyan a little late, and a man says to me that if I come late I should stay in the fuse-box closet, and not walk past the men and distract them to get behind the filing cabinet. It sounds ridiculous, but that's what he said.

A few times that year I ended up praying in the fuse-box closet (I was always the only woman at the minyan) which didn't feel a whole lot different from behind the filing cabinet—though I probably felt more angry in the fuse-box closet.

Actually, the whole experience made me angry, but I must have liked feeling that way—maybe because I was mad that my father had died, and it was easier to feel enraged at the injustice of these men than to feel devastated about my father. I wasn't going to let these men take away from me the comfort of saying Kaddish—this comfort belonged to me as well as to every Jew. I felt that my fury was on behalf of other women—it was an injustice to all of us—because a lot of women would have given up at this minyan, but I was lucky enough to know the value of saying Kaddish, of having this tradition. So I hung on.

I'm not so rebellious against God (if it *was* God that made my father die). I don't know that I could quarrel with God about that, but I could feel righteous indignation about the smallmindedness of these insensitive men.

Somewhere near the end of my Kaddish year, an Israeli couple, in the accountant's office for business, were prevailed upon to stay for the minyan, and the woman joined me behind the filing cabinet. It was the only time there was ever another woman there. We talked in Hebrew, and she was very indignant in particular, for some reason, about the chairs—that the men had chairs but I didn't. I myself hadn't minded about the chairs; it was only a few minutes, it wasn't a big deal.

The Israeli woman asked me, "Why do you put up with this?" and I answered, "Maybe I need to keep my anger. If I had a chair," I said, "I'd be comfortable."

—by Naomi Danis as told to Susan Schnur

Sharon, Phyllis and Fawn, a circle of hens surrounding the *bimah*, sat me in a stiff chair with the Torah in my arms. I listened as Esther Klevens, legendary for having taught generations of St. Louis boys and girls their *bar* and *bat mitzvah* portions, began to sing the *Haftorah*. Sitting, facing the crowd, I looked around awkwardly. Then I noticed three young girls sitting in the front row, their legs dangling in white tights and shiny black patent shoes, their eyes glued to Esther and me. This was certainly the first time they had seen women leading prayers. I wondered how this experience would reverberate in their lives; I was glad my own daughter would grow up with images like this before her.

Then Ronni gave the *d'var Torah*, a haunting, beautiful, and distinctly female fugue of reflections on the saga of Jacob, Rachel and Leah. But before she was finished, Chaim, who had set up the *kiddish* at Bais Abraham for the past half century, began banging loudly on the back doors.

A hawk-eyed woman in a gray suit poked her head in. "How much longer will you be here?"

"Two minutes," Ronni said.

"Chaim needs to set up *kiddish*." She banged the doors closed.

Ronni left off her *d'var Torah* and launched into the *Aleinu*, gaining speed with each paragraph. We could hear the men's footsteps on the stairs, a crowd gathering outside the doors. Chaim entered while we were still singing, stamping past us into the kitchen. He emerged again, carrying bottles of grape juice and whiskey which he began smacking onto the plastic-covered tables, his anger palpable. Another woman, her lips pursed tightly, stormed in and out of the kitchen as noisily as she could, carrying paper plates piled with sponge cakes to the tables.

We, meanwhile, were racing to the finish, giggling, stealing glances at one another. Every now and then the back doors opened and a man peeked in, scoffing loudly and crashing the doors shut again.

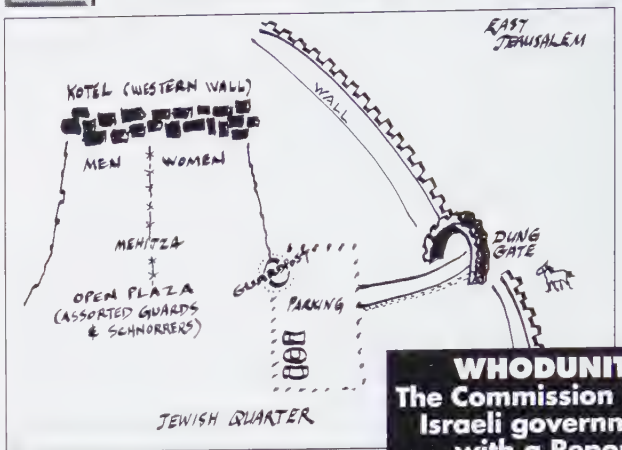
"Let's sing *Adon Olam* as we collect the chairs," Sharon suggested, trying to speed us along. We sprang into action, singing and laughing hysterically. All at once the men burst through the doors; all of them—with the exception of our husbands—looking furious.

But we had done it. We had done it!

It felt strange and new and different, but also familiar, standing in that circle of women, praying and singing together. And for the first time I glimpsed it, that ancient, hidden Torah that the mystics speak of, that I had been seeking for so long—the one written with black fire on white fire that rests on God's knee, that recipe handed down from the original kitchen. Out of that book, I knew now with certainty, worlds unquestionably begin. □

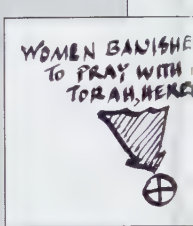
Shelly Fredman writes fiction and essays on Jewish themes. She is based in St. Louis, MO.

Case #4 SACRED WALL?



WHODUNIT:
The Commission in th
Israeli government
with a Report

How can this RESTRICTED site be called SACRED when women are forbidden to pray out loud here?



In 1988, women came to the Kotel [Jerusalem's Western Wall] with a Torah and were greeted with curses and thrown chairs. Israel's Supreme Court, in deference to halacha, told them that "the voice of the woman is lewd."

Three years ago, the Israeli government called a truce: If women held off on praying aloud or with the Torah at the Wall, a Commission would find a way to accommodate all parties who want to pray at the Wall. The (all-male) panel met for months, in April issuing its astonishing recommendation: that women praying as a group be banished from the Wall altogether.

Disappointing, but not final: a *second* Commission will hear arguments on July 29 from the International Committee for Women of the Wall (ICWOW) *and* the first Commission.

What *should* emerge is a real compromise—a time-sharing arrangement in the women's section at the Kotel so that women who wish to can wear *tallitot*, read from the Torah, and pray aloud as a group. Such an arrangement has been assured at the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron for Jews and Arabs. Jewish women's rights (and rites) at the Kotel should be no less important, says ICWOW.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials and their representatives in America seem not even to know of the Commission's existence. The chief spokesman for the Minister of Religion says that *he* knows nothing about it. Likewise the Consulate in New York. What women? What Commission? What Wall?

Outraged, as we are? Send a tax-deductible check to help with legal fees: ICWOW, c/o Rabbi Helene Ferris, 215 Hessian Hills Rd., Croton, NY 10520.

—Susan Schnur and Sarah Blustain

Dudu in Heaven

a short story

by Deborah Reich

At the beginning of June, 1967, when my brother Dudu was finally called up, I was tending the bananas. One evening he was there, and the next morning he was gone. I never got to say goodbye.

Nearly all the girls of high school age were sent to work in the bananas after most of the *bananchikim* (along with most of the other guys) had left to join their units. We tried very hard to be as productive as the regular work force would have been, pushing ourselves to the limit of our physical capacity, and then some. This did nicely for keeping one's mind off things better not thought about. In that last couple of weeks before the war actually broke out, I sprouted a lot of blisters on my right hand from clutching the curved, round-handled knife that's used for stripping away the dead leaves to make breathing room for the baby plants to grow. On my left hand, I got blisters of a markedly different configuration from grasping the leaves to be hacked off. I can turn my hands over now and look at the palms and see those blisters gazing back at me like so many blind, yet troubled, eyes.

My mother kept busy—between the laundry, the children's houses, the removing and stacking of the glass window panes from the old dining hall, the organizing of mattresses and blankets for the bomb shelters, and who knows what else. My father was called away already in the middle of May, to chafe at some hush-hush desk job involving logistics and supply. He knew he was going to be treated as only just barely too old for combat, and it galled him, because he would have preferred to go one more time in Dudu's place, if such a thing could have been possible, but of course it wasn't. Still, his train of thought was utterly transparent, and shared by lots of other parents, no doubt, most of whom had better luck at hiding their feelings, so all you saw on the outside when a son's name was mentioned was the pride, the determination, the discipline. It gets to be a habit after so many wars, I suppose.

Losing a brother in Israel.

Besides the blisters, my other problem was cigarettes. I was already addicted, at seventeen. When we discovered that the units bivouacked along the Jordan River, just behind the *meshek,* had no cigarettes, we went around collecting everyone's stash and someone took it all down to the soldiers and so there I was, smokeless. I was glad to contribute mine, needless to say; but at the same time doing without made me edgy and resentful, and this made me feel a little guilty. My father came back from wherever he was one day for a few hours' leave, and brought me a couple of packs of Marlboro someone had given him as a gift. He didn't say anything about my smoking; just handed them to me and brushed off my thanks and turned to my mother, and they went arm in arm for a walk in the dusky tension of the sweaty Jordan Valley summer.

My sister Shula called me whenever she could, but the phone system was a mess, overloaded and plagued with breakdowns, and you weren't supposed to tie up a line for personal calls unless it was really necessary. My mother worried about her because her unit would be in the front lines when fighting broke out and Shula, because of her job, wouldn't be far from her unit no matter where they went—although technically she wouldn't be in combat herself. I suspected that Mom was bitter because the

Arabs seemed unwilling to postpone this war for another few months until Shula was done with her army service (she was due to finish in September), but of course we never spoke of it.

Mom was even more of a *yekke* than Dad when it came to doing what was expected of one; she wouldn't have considered it patriotic to give voice to such an ordinary maternal sentiment if it had the appearance of begrudging anything to the war effort. Her terror for Dudu she kept hidden best of all. During the latter part of May, when most of his classmates were already gone and he was still at home, restless and uneasy after two attempts to report to his unit had been rebuffed, his orders obviously snarled somewhere in a mass of red tape, my mother would reassure him quietly, dry-voiced and dry-eyed: all right, Dudu, she would murmur, pouring out the coffee with a steady hand, your turn will come soon enough. And suddenly on the last night of May there was a phone call, and almost simultaneously someone arrived to collect him, and he left straightaway, with no time for goodbyes.

Dudu in fact made it almost all the way through and then fell on the last day of the war, on Shabbat, in the final battle for the Golan Heights.

I was standing with everyone else at the northeastern edge of the *meshek* and squinting into the distance to watch the troops make their ascent against what was left of the Syrian positions on the heights, which had been partially disabled by our bombardments earlier. I saw several of the old-timers standing around gazing up at the Syrian fortifications, toward which our men—their sons—seemed to be crawling in slow motion like so many ants through molasses; and these hard-bitten old *vatikim* stood grimly on the lawn following the progress of the battle through binoculars, many with tears running down their cheeks. And if that weren't enough, here and there someone spoke under his breath about the hand of God—a peculiar turn of phrase when invoked in that way by someone who'd been a devout atheist-kibbutznick for forty or fifty years.

We lost four of our boys in that war: one in Jerusalem, and two others, like Dudu, on the Golan.

What haunted me most was that while I had, in a sense, watched my brother die, I had never had a chance to say a proper farewell—or any farewell, if you come right down to it.

Every year, in June, I would stand at his grave with my armload of flowers and tell him, Dudu, I miss you...and I wish we'd had the chance to say goodbye.

Well, that's how it went for some years. When Shula finished her service she had promptly married her boyfriend, a guy from Shaar HaGolan who lost an eye in that war, and they went to live on his kibbutz and started having babies. I did my bit in the army, didn't learn much but didn't mind it as much as I might have, and later on I married Dani, a *raftan* from HaZorea whom I had met on a course the year I turned twenty-four. We started having babies of our own, and my parents gradually began to take it a little easier at work, and to spend more time being grandparents.

Recently, my oldest son Erez turned eighteen, and the week before he went into the army I had the strangest experience one night. I still don't know for certain whether it was a dream or not—although I suppose it must have been—and yet, it felt so real at the time.

June was almost upon us, which meant that Dudu was more than ordinarily in my thoughts. Dani was away—he's teaching a ten–week course (on computers in the dairy) at Ruppin and he stays overnight there from Sundays through Thursdays. I don't mind really—it gives me a bit more time with my adolescents, Sarai and Noa, who are an extra handful, being twins, and my "sandwich" boy Hagai, who tends to get lost in the middle between Erez and the girls.

It began at supper, when the kids were talking about what they would wish for if they could have only one wish. Erez wished that he would pass the pilots' course; Hagai, the redhead, wished he'd been born without freckles; and the girls, arguing amiably counterpoint as usual, wished for a magic lantern with a genie who would grant them unlimited wishes whenever they pleased. Hagai turned to me and said, well mom, what would you wish for? And because I was busy dishing out the supper I spoke without thinking: I wish I could see Dudu, just once more, I said, adding into the sudden silence around the table, well, you know, I never got to say goodbye....

Erez ducked his head, Sarai said please pass the ketchup, Noa said gee mom, you still really miss him, huh, and Hagai suddenly said, in that half-facetious way he uses to fend off

...why don't you get dressed and come with me?

stress: Tell you what mom—I'll give up getting rid of my freckles and let you have my wish, too; maybe that'll help. He caught my gaze, shrugged one shoulder, and glanced away toward the opposite wall and the picture of his uncle Dudu, whom he greatly resembles (except for the red hair and freckles): the same square jaw, round cheeks, and cleft chin; but Dudu had brown eyes and Hagai's are hazel. I opened my throat to say thank you and found I had a lump in my throat the size of a grapefruit.

During the night I woke up—or anyhow I thought I did—and standing there was my old company commander, looking a little older but otherwise just the same, and he said Shalom, Kiki (it was my nickname in those days), how are you doing? And I said, a bit taken aback, fine thanks, Giora, but what are you doing here? (Giora died in Lebanon in 1982.) Oh well, he said, they sent me because they figured it would seem more natural that way...why don't you get dressed and come with me? Okay, I said, still mystified but inclined to go along. I'll wait in the living room, he said, and went out. I got dressed and went as if to look in on the kids but Giora said, coming into the front hall, never mind, Kiki, the kids will be fine. Come on.

So we went out and got into his jeep—the very same one, it seemed, that he'd driven all those years ago—and we drove north a bit, and around Ein Gev...and then the road seemed to climb steeply and suddenly there was a sort of heavy fog, highly unlikely at that time of year but there it was, and when we came out of it, we were in a place I didn't recognize. It looked like a cross between an army base and a Club Med.

Listen Kiki, said Giora (a little abashedly, I thought), just go on over there to the picnic area and I'll see you in a little while back at the jeep, okay? I nodded and turned to go. And don't worry about anything, he called after me. I nodded again, sketching a half-salute over my shoulder.

I walked in the direction Giora had indicated and as I began to get closer I saw two young guys in rumpled fatigues, engrossed in a game of backgammon, sitting at a picnic table in a shady grove, with dappled sunlight playing on them from above. One, I suddenly recognized, was Dudu, and the other was unknown to me. Or rather, someone I had never actually met. A strange sensation in my abdomen seemed to suggest that in some way I did know him....

Dudu looked up and saw me, and jumped and ran to embrace me. We leaned into one another and the years seemed to peel away and we were young again, and it was the strangest thing I've ever experienced, and the most natural. I guess I must have been crying because I got his shirt wet at the shoulder. Here, Kiki, he said, pulling a tattered bit of cloth out of his pocket. Blow your nose. We laughed and I thought, since when does Dudu carry a handkerchief? But it seemed natural all the same.

His friend, who was wearing an insignia I vaguely recognized but could not quite place, favored me with one bright smile and then sat there quietly and waited, while Dudu and I sat a little apart and talked—or rather, he asked questions and I answered them. He wanted to know about Mom and Dad, about Shula, about me....I told about our marriages, and children, and about how my Hagai looks so much like him, except for the hazel eyes, the freckles and the red hair, which come from Dani's side....And I said, Dudu, we never got to say goodbye. And he said, I know sweetie, but now it doesn't matter anymore. We put our arms around each other and I knew it was time for me to leave; he raised one arm from around my shoulder and waved, over my head, to Giora, waiting over yonder by the jeep.

As I stood up to go, I said to Dudu, your friend is very quiet, and the friend and I kind of nodded, hello and goodbye, the way people do in those situations when they haven't been introduced. Did you two, I asked, serve together on the Golan? (It seemed a bit more diplomatic than: were you killed there together?) Well, said Dudu, with a faint smile, yeah, kind of, but not the way you mean. I raised an eyebrow inquiringly, and he shrugged, and the other fellow shrugged too as if to say well, go ahead then, tell her. This is my sister Rivka about whom you've heard so much, said Dudu; and this is Khaled, the guy who shot me. As I turned—surprised yet somehow not surprised—to take a closer look at the soldier who had killed my brother, Dudu added, as if in explanation or apology, I shot him too, you see; so here we are. I nodded slowly, trying to take it in. So here you are, I echoed softly. Yes. I see.

Somewhat uncertainly, I offered Khaled my hand and he shook it solemnly; his touch was warm and dry. I remember thinking that it didn't feel like shaking hands with a dead enemy soldier, or a bloodthirsty Arab, or the killer of my beloved Dudu; just an ordinary young man with a baggy camouflage uniform and a wholesome smile (and perhaps a shadow of something homesick around the eyes, something a mother would notice without really trying), sitting at a picnic table in a shady grove, playing backgammon with...another like himself.

I don't recall much about the drive home in Giora's jeep, except that I wept soundlessly, without effort but unable to stop, for most of the way. The next morning I woke to a room so filled with sunlight that every single tiny floating speck of dust appeared to have its own shimmering halo. I felt somehow weightless yet very tired, and I was more that a little preoccupied over the morning coffee. □

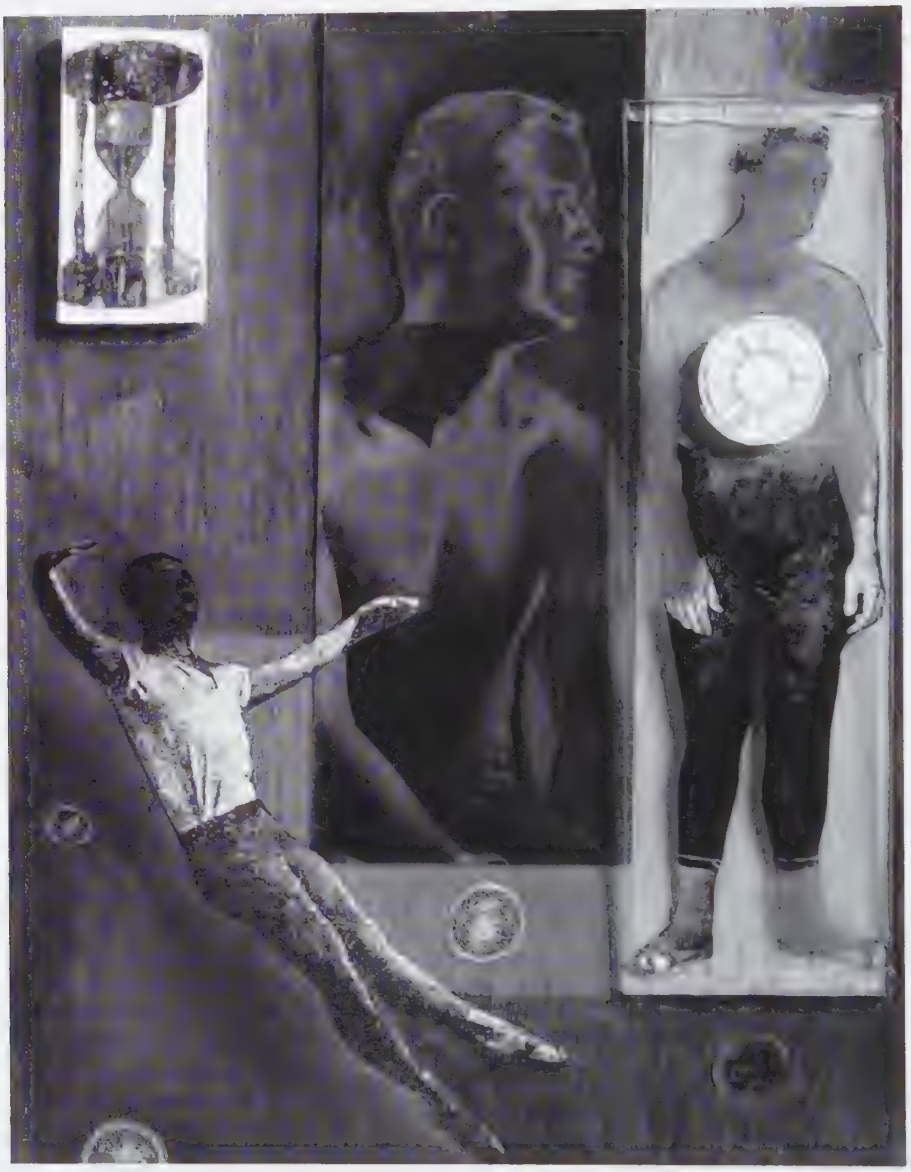
Deborah Reich, expatriate New Yorker and sometime kibbutznik, lives in Karkur, Israel and writes at night while her two kids and one dog are fast asleep and dreaming dreams of their own.

NEW FICTION

The Persistence of Memory

a short story

by Elissa P. Matthews



EMILYA NAYMARK

Whenever I see that picture of the clocks melting all over the place I think of my brother Izzie's wife Gitla and what happened to her. Her memories came up and practically bit her right in the *tuchas*. But that's what happens, isn't it? Inside our heads time rolls around like a ball of string, getting tangled in everything, and the memories you thought you had packed away in the back of the hall closet come tumbling out all over the floor one day when someone opens the door the wrong way, so to speak. But it was just a shame, what happened to Gitla.

It started with my nephew Herbie, Gitla and Izzie's boy. I knew first, but I didn't tell anyone. I maybe hinted a little to Izzie, but he told me I was crazy, so alright, I know

when to keep my mouth shut. But I saw them. There I was, splitting a corned beef on rye with Ruth Feinberg in that deli on 87th, which is pretty good, only they give you too much sandwich for one and not enough slaw for two, when I saw the two boys in the booth in the very back corner. They were whispering and holding hands. With each other. And the thing is, the blond one is my nephew Herbie. Right away I think, "Uh oh, Gitla, you're not going to be a grandma any time soon."

"Don't look," I said to Ruth, but of course she looked. Thank heaven they didn't notice.

I tell Ruth, "Personally, I think live and let live. But Gitla is going to drop dead when she finds out. She's so..." I am hunting for a word to describe Gitla. When my brother first brought her home to meet Momma and Poppa, I didn't take to her at all. She was always in charge, making a big fuss over the dinner, making a big fuss over Izzie, making a big fuss over the wedding. And she always had to be right, no matter what. "Claire," she said to me, "if you fluff your hair up a little in front it would be much more flattering."

"I like my hair like this, it highlights my eyes."

"That's what I mean," she peered at me intently, "are you sure you want people to notice that your one eye is just a tiny bit smaller than the other?"

But Momma liked her. "She has a good heart," Momma said. "And she's strong, she'll be good for Izzie, she'll keep him in line."

After a while I got to like her too, but she still made a big fuss about everything and had to be right all the time. When I broke my arm she made enough food to feed Coxey's army and filled my kitchen. "You shouldn't be working, you should be resting," she told me. "And if you need anything else, you let me know, it's no trouble. And when you're back on your feet, I'll give you the name of my cousin's carpenter, he built the most beautiful cabinets for her kitchen, she had old ones just like yours."

I cannot explain all this to Ruth. "She's one of the strong ones," I finally say, but Ruth gives me a look means she doesn't understand. Ruth was born in America, she didn't go to the camps. In the camps, you got so you could pick out the weak ones and the strong ones right away, without thinking it through with your brain. You didn't spend time with the weak ones, not unless they were family.

"They had homosexuals in the camps, too," I told Ruth. "They were brought in for re-education and right thinking." I shuddered. In some ways, that had been worse.

I peeked over at Herbie and his friend in their corner, without really looking, so they wouldn't see. Gitla was always *kvelling* about how handsome her Herbie was, with his blond hair and his great cheekbones.

"You should see all the girls who chase him," Gitla said.

"I've fixed him up with Essie Miller, I think we're going to hear an announcement soon," Gitla said.

"He can choose any girl he wants, no wonder he can't settle down. I should only have been so good-looking when I was a girl," Gitla said.

"He's studying to be a doctor," I tell Ruth, "he's studying with a cancer specialist at Sloan-Kettering."

"He must be very smart," Ruth says politely, since Herbie is my brother's boy.

"By Gitla, he's Albert Schweitzer," I say, "but how smart can he be, holding hands with his boyfriend right here in Goldfarb's where anybody can see?"

And sure enough, wasn't I right? It was no more than two months later they did get caught. Of course I had to hear it from Charlotte Brodstein, who got it from her husband David, who got it from Izzie, who should have told his own sister first but he was so *meshuggah* from the whole thing he wasn't thinking straight. According to Charlotte, Gitla and Izzie were supposed to meet Herbie at his apartment and bring him a dinner, only Herbie forgot, and when Gitla and Izzie get there the boyfriend answers the door in his bathrobe.

"Hello," he says, "who are you?"

"We're Herbie's parents," Gitla says, "who are you?"

And just then Herbie comes skittering to the door wearing only his bathrobe, so even a blind cow with a headcold could tell what had been going on.

Right away Gitla starts to scream, "How could you do this to me? I raised you right! I raised you to be a good boy, I gave you love and I took care of you, and this is how you repay me?" And she drops the bag of dinner, Charlotte says, and the jar of borscht breaks and spills on Izzie's shoes and most of the hall floor.

Then Herbie starts screaming, "Don't tell me how much you sacrificed for me. All you ever think about is yourself. No matter what happens to anyone else, no matter how hard something is for someone else, all that counts is how you feel, not how anyone else feels."

Then the boyfriend starts crying, "Please stop, you two, please don't fight about this. I can't stand it when people who love each other fight."

So she's screaming and Herbie's screaming and the boyfriend is crying and Izzie starts to feel his heart pounding, he has a weak heart, you know, he takes those little pills, and he leans against the wall to catch his breath and Gitla yells, "You see what

A Holocaust survivor mother and a gay son pulled apart by their secrets

you've done now, you're killing your father, that's what you're doing, you're ripping the heart right out of his body." And she grabs Izzie and marches him down the stairs and drives him home.

"And then what happened?" I ask Charlotte.

"What should happen?" Charlotte says. She shrugs her shoulders up and down. "She'll start talking to him again sooner or later. She has to, she only has one son."

But I think to myself, she can be pretty stubborn, Gitla can. And Herbie, when it comes to stubborn, he's no slouch either. From the time he was a little boy, when he wanted something he would cross his little arms over his chest and just stand there with his bottom lip sticking out. He was the cutest little bug, going nose to nose with Gitla over turnips. And more often than not he would win. She would heave a great sigh and throw her arms around him and laugh, with the dimples just like his coming out in her cheeks. "Alright then, you little *schmendrik,* go play. But tomorrow you eat your vegetables, you hear?" And he would give her a big kiss back, and all would be fine until the next fight.

Somewhere along the way, the kisses got lost and the only thing they have left is the stubborn.

After a while things mostly settled down, but Gitla still refused to speak to Herbie. She tried to get him banned from the family holidays but that didn't work. The first year she says to me, since Seder is always at my house, "If he's going to be there, so help me I will turn around and go home, take your pick, him or me." But Gitla's mother, may she rest in peace, who was still alive that year, 84 and as mean as the day she was born, God bless her, announced that since she only had a few years left to live, she was going to spend them with Herbie since she'd already put up with Gitla for 63. So Herbie kept coming to the family dinners, and Gitla kept not speaking to him, and we all got used to looking the other way and not getting too close if it seemed the fireworks were about to start.

But people can get used to anything, can't they, and after a while it starts to seem normal. Personally, I think this is what holds families together, they stop noticing how crazy things really are and start thinking it's the way things should be. So the fireworks didn't start on their own, they got pushed. Gitla's mother died just before the new year but Herbie came to the Seder just like usual. Only this year, Herbie brings his boyfriend, the same one I saw in Goldfarb's that day, mind you. Things were a little tense, what with Gitla talking to everyone but the two boys, and being very obvious about it, and making lots of snide comments about abominations before God, especially on a holy night, and Izzie trying not to take sides, and the boyfriend talking about how everyone ought to hold hands, and the rest of the family trying to act normal, and in this family that's a tough job, even with a full wind behind and three horses pulling.

So we sit down to dinner, and after the service, which as usual runs a little too long, and what with all that wine, and the lamb and the turkey and the sweet potatoes with the kosher marshmallows on top, and the matzoh and the honey cakes, and the macaroons and the marzipan, maybe a couple people aren't thinking so good. Nobody really notices at first that Gitla's sister Sarah is drinking a little more than usual. So maybe she starts getting a little drunk, and Gitla apparently has to say something, so she says, "You gonna keep drinking until you fall over, or you gonna stop one of these years?"

Sarah looks up, and she looks Gitla straight in the eye, and she says, "Getting drunk is the only way I can put up with your shit. This is my family too, you know."

Gitla pulls herself up very straight at the table and looks at Sarah from her little eyes with just the eyelashes poking out. "I don't know what you're talking about," she says very slowly.

"Yes you do, Gitla." Sarah is shaking now. "You know what I'm talking about."

"No, Sarah, I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do." Her hands are squeezing the napkin like she's going to tear it in half. "You've been treating Herbie like garbage for years now, and while Momma was alive I was going to keep my mouth shut, but you're getting worse, not better, and I'm going to put a stop to it right now."

Gitla has this frozen look like even her skin has been turned into stone, and she's sitting there, all the plates still on the table in front of her, and she doesn't say a word.

"You want to know how come your mother is so upset about you being a queer?" Sarah says to Herbie.

Herbie, who is no dope, even if he is Izzie's son, stares at his plate and doesn't say a word. The boyfriend is completely white, and he's for sure

Somewhere along the way, the kisses got lost and the only thing they have left is the stubborn....Herbie kept coming to the family dinners, and Gitla kept not speaking to him.

not looking at anyone.

Sarah looks around the table, her face stretched tight over her bones, and there isn't anyone who says a word to stop her.

Sarah starts to speak at last, her voice low and fast. "I've let Gitla get away with this for too long already. You know why she hates you being queer? Because she thinks you got it from her."

Sarah got this sneaky-mean look on her face. She'd spilled her dirt, now she was driving the wagon.

In the heavy silence that follows this, I heard a moth beating its wings against the glass of the dining room window. "Who's ready for coffee?" I call out.

Gitla's shoulders and jaw were as stiff and as square as I had ever seen them. Dark, blood-stained patches were growing on her cheeks. "You are a fool, Sarah. You are a stupid fool." Her voice was high and tight.

"I was there, Git. She gave you that locket she managed to hide from the guards all those years."

"That's not true."

Sarah relaxed and got this sneaky-mean look on her face. She'd spilled her dirt, now she was driving the wagon. "What was her name? Miriam? Marta? Ah yes, Maya." She took a sip of her wine and leaned back in her chair. "She was really beautiful, wasn't she, with her dark, gypsy eyes and her red, red lips. And the way she used to laugh, I can still hear her. It frightened me when she laughed, that someone might hear." In the silence around the table Sarah's small chuckle rang loud. "You still have that locket in your jewelry box. I saw it there when I put back the pearl earrings I borrowed that time."

"That's not true." Gitla's voice was still and calm enough to freeze cream, but her face was flushed dark and blotchy under the thick skin. Sarah turned to Herbie and leaned forward across the table. "You know what happened to Maya? After the war, Maya went off to marry a man, and your mother stayed in bed and cried for three days."

A low sound started. It didn't sound like it was coming from Gitla, not at first. It sounded like it was coming from the room in back of her, or the closet, it was so low and hollow. It was a sound that ran right through your bones, and only when it got louder did I realize it was Gitla, screaming, screaming so deep down inside that it echoed like a train in a tunnel. And it got louder, and louder, and louder, a train rushing closer from a long, long distance away, until the children put their hands over their ears, and even the silverware began to jiggle a little. She didn't seem to need air to breathe, she was just screaming without moving a muscle. Then she leaped out of her chair, knocking it over backward with a crash and smashing her hands down on the plate full of gravy and potatoes. "THAT'S NOT TRUE!" she screamed in that same train rushing, thundering voice. Then the sound stopped with a suddenness like a bang, and she ran from the table, out the door to the street, slamming it behind her.

Izzie looked around at us all, his face blank and lost. "Go after her," I said quietly, "she needs you now." And he, too, disappeared out the door. I wondered what Momma would have thought.

After the door shut behind him, we all just sat there, not looking at each other, not saying a word. I tried to think of something to say, but I couldn't. It didn't seem to be the right time to pour coffee.

Finally Herbie coughed. His boyfriend sat slumped in his chair, ashen grey. He looked old and tired. I suppose we all did, a little. "Why did you do that, Aunt Sarah?" Herbie asked.

She turned to him slowly with tears running down her sunken cheeks. "At the end of three days, the sister I had loved with all my heart, who dragged me, barely alive, through four years of hell, my sister was gone and that stranger came to take her place." With a single, fierce movement she picked up her wineglass and flung it at the wall where it shattered into little pieces, leaving a broad arc of wine behind. "I wanted to hurt her, God damn it!" Then she too ran out the door into the night. Thin lines of purple trickled down through the blue flowers on the wallpaper.

After that everyone else left, saying quiet goodbyes.

Misha and I cleared away the dishes and cleaned up the mess. "Gitla will start talking to Herbie again now," Misha said. "To save face."

"I know. But it won't be the same." I scrubbed at the big blotch on the dining room wall.

"That stain won't come out," he said, watching me scrub. "We'll have to put up new wallpaper."

"It was time for new paper," I said, putting the sponge away. "Ruth Feinberg has almost the same pattern in her dining room, and I was getting tired of it anyway." I sat down in one of the empty dining room chairs and the waves of tired rolled over and over me, like they had in Buchenwald. I just wanted to lie down, shut my eyes, and sleep. □

Elissa Matthews lives in New Jersey with her husband and son. She is currently working on a novel about racism and prejudice, seen through the eyes of a teenage boy whose mother is passing as white.

Wayward Hearts

A SHORT STORY

by Nancy Reisman

Ben Abrams was not a bad man; he was a practical man confused by grief, the force of which can shatter stone. Instead of breaking, Ben twisted in its blinding current, which rushed through him to my family. I fell within weeks, pulling my husband along with me. My sister, once immersed, swept beyond our reach.

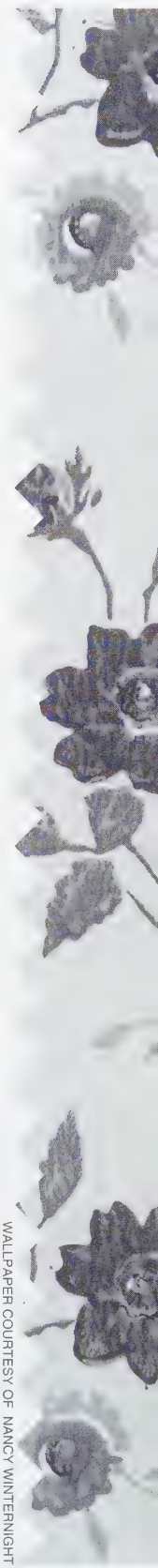
Ben started out a poor boy in Buffalo and met his great love, Edith Rosenberg, just after the war. At a Rochester wedding reception he saw her slipping into the shadows and sneaking an extra glass of wine behind her father's back— a willowy beauty, properly shy with men. She blushed when she realized she'd been seen, but kept her composure as her cousin introduced Ben, smiled, accepted one dance, dismissed him. *Edith*, he repeated to himself, *Edith*. From their first awkward conversation, he believed she'd hung the moon, and her presence in this world shook him loose from our neighborhood in Buffalo, emptied his savings account, pulled him to Rochester where he worked like an animal and prayed he would be worthy, and where, eventually, he met with her father behind closed doors. He agreed to stay in Rochester. He agreed to take a house on the Rosenberg's street. On his knees he proposed.

Ben loved Edith with a mute ferocity punctuated by grand gestures: buckets of roses, pearls from Gamler's. At the breakfast table she'd find gold bracelets, diamond studs, a ring of tiny sapphires. Edith accepted his devotion with apparent serenity: who knows if she was happy. She saw her mother every day, learned to cook French, and, later, spent most of her waking hours with her children. In summer they stayed in a cottage at Crystal Beach. In winter she taught the children to skate. On Saturday nights Ben took her out for dinner and she wore the diamond studs. She was otherwise careless about the jewelry: her girls wore the pearls for dress-up. The oldest was five, the second daughter four, and the boy about two when Edith died, her blood rife with cancer. It was 1953 and the doctors were all but helpless. Ben's strength stayed with him through her illness, those long nights at her bedside; he prayed with the fervor of a Hasid, a blind optimism gracing him until the end. When she died, he became unmoored. He wandered his furniture store at night, touching the chairs and sofas as if they were her body. His mother in-law cooked supper for the children and got them to bed. The little girls and his young son were invisible to him; it was as if they existed only in relation to his beautiful Edith.

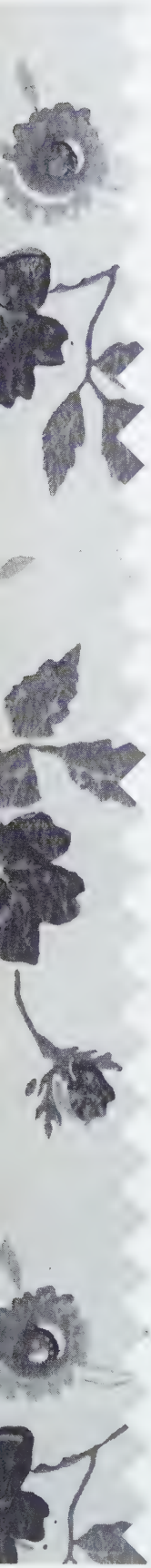
> Unwanted attentions press on a faithful marriage.

Ben appeared on our front porch in June, before the lilacs browned. He stood just downwind of the bush, not touching the blossoms, numb to the impulse to crush his face against them. He wore a deep brown suit, a dark tie, removed his hat when Sam walked out onto the porch: a man paying his respects. They had been ushers at each other's weddings. Sam, in his weekend workshirt and trousers, took Ben's face in his hands, hugged Ben, patted him on the back, led him to the rocker on the sunny corner of the porch. Ben moved with the stiff-jointed swaying of a marionette, an inhabited man. He spoke little. They sat together in the mild breeze, Sam asking questions with definite, easy answers and telling news of the neighborhood he otherwise wouldn't repeat: What do you recommend in sofas, Ben? Thursday's thunderstorm hit Rochester? I hear your cousin Frieda's off to college. After twenty minutes, Ben rose, fingered the brim of his hat, and stepped out onto the front walk, refusing Sam's invitations to stay and offers to escort him elsewhere.

Edith had only been gone a month then, but Ben began to spend whole weekends in Buffalo, leaving his children with his in-laws, automatically driving west, following back roads lined by cornfields and orchards, emerging into our close and crowded



WALLPAPER COURTESY OF NANCY WINTERNIGHT



neighborhood. He wandered from the house of one friend or relative to another. Door after door opened to him, and as he walked down one street and up another, aunts and cousins would line the sidewalk, watching, as if their gazes would safeguard his arrival somewhere else.

I don't remember the first time he stayed for a meal: what I remember are particular courses of particular meals, the expression on Ben's face as he ate a bowl of soup, his eyes flat as fish. One afternoon, when I handed him a teacup, I noticed his skin tone had become more olive and pink. There was a flicker of a smile when my daughter Sarah smeared her face with pudding. When his eyes regained expression, I noticed how large, how round they were—the color of woods, fur, sleep. He gazed at my belly as I moved about the room: I was pregnant again, just showing. There was, by August, the sort of intensity to his look I had heard women talk of when he was younger, when he was a single man. I turned away to tend to Sarah and a hole began to burn through the back of my blouse.

Those nights, after Ben had left for Rochester and Sarah had fallen asleep, I would hold Sam to me as I had at no other time. Our marriage was a passionate one, and our intimate pleasures had been curtailed only in the months after Sarah's birth. But those nights of Ben's first visits we crushed ourselves against each other, swayed and moaned with the fierceness of prayer, as if we had seen how the world might end and in our coupling would stave it off.

In late summer Ben came alive. He began to arrive with gifts: tomatoes, sweet corn, baskets of peaches. His voice regained its resonance and surety, a more natural timbre. He told old stories. *When Sam and I were ten*, he'd say, *When Mrs. Moscowitz caught Sam behind the ball park, When Arnie Stein was drunk at shul.* In the afternoons he walked the neighborhood with Sam and Sarah. Twice I heard him laugh; each time a craving rose up in me.

Soon the gifts began to change. One week Ben brought a bud vase, one week perfumed writing paper. One week he gave me a velvet lined box; inside, an extravagant gold hair clip.

I knew I should not keep it.

"It's lovely," I said, "but Ben."

"Try it on," he said.

Sam's mouth opened and closed on air.

"Perhaps later," I said.

"No, no, wear it today," Ben said.

"Something to save for your girls."

His face folded in on itself. "You don't like it?"

"I told you, it's lovely."

"Then try it. What can it hurt?"

I looked to Sam, who was sliding behind his newspaper.

"Go ahead," Ben said.

I relented, pulled my hair out of the loose bun I wore, brushed it back, twisted it and set the clip in place.

"That's beautiful, your hair like that."

"Sam?" I said.

A few seconds passed. "Don't you think? Sam?" Ben said.

Sam dropped the paper for an instant. "Nice." His face was locked shut.

When it came time for Sam and Sarah to leave for their walk, Ben insisted I join them, promising to help me clean the dishes. We all drove over to Delaware Park and he slipped his arm through mine as we walked over the green lawns, and Sarah ran circles around the maples, Sam behind her, threatening to catch up. Sam was lifting Sarah in the air, spinning her around, when Ben leaned over and kissed me on the forehead. We were standing very close then. I blushed. Stray red leaves curled across the grass. "It's getting to be autumn," I said. I called to Sarah. "Look at the leaves." My voice instantly brought her back to me, as I knew it would, Sam following along.

That day, before he returned to Rochester, Ben kissed my hand. We were standing in the doorway, in clear view of the entire neighborhood. He held my wrist for several seconds, a man in a trance, his mouth pressing against my knuckles.

"He's lonely, Sam," I said that night. "He's lonely and grateful." I put the hair clip on the top closet shelf and climbed into bed. Sam nodded at me, his curls falling thick over his forehead. He wrapped his hands in my hair and, slowly, wrapped his body around mine.

But for weeks after we did not sleep entwined. At night Sam would offer up a solemn kiss and turn to the far side of the bed, his movements heavy and doltish. He did not touch me. My skin became the shell of a more solitary creature, thick with loneliness. I thought of Ben, the pressure of his mouth against my wrist, and then I became more human, my breathing quickened, my thighs dampened and warmed. I imagined Ben's fingers circling over my breasts. Sam would shift in bed, or slip into light snoring, and I'd freeze, an animal caught in light. Once or twice I reached over to him, hoping to bring him back and blot Ben from my mind. But Sam pulled further away, curled into himself at the edge of the bed.

On the loneliest night yet, when the dream of Ben was so strong I felt him in the room, I tried to break away by stroking Sam's shoulders and back, slipping my hands beneath his night clothes, pressing against his chest. He pulled away. "Marilyn, get some sleep." It was as if he smelled Ben on my skin. I left our bed and checked on Sarah. She slept soundly, curled on her side the way Sam did. In her room there was peace, and I stayed in the rocker by her crib, dozing, waking, watching her roll, fling an arm over her head, find her thumb. Nothing compared to her small mouth, the wild dark curls that she'd inherited from Sam, the texture of her face, her light breathing. Hers was the room in which my visions of Ben vanished. At 5 a.m. I rose, scrubbed myself with hot water and soap, and brewed the morning coffee.

The last Sunday Ben and I were alone together, he brought me a bouquet of late roses. Sam said nothing. He left the house to check on his mother. He did not take Sarah, whom he had promised the afternoon to, and who wailed as he hurried away from the house. I told Ben I hadn't much time, there was bread to bake. Instead of leaving he hovered near me in the kitchen, watching the clouds of flour float above my hands, rolling a pinch of dough between his thumb and his forefinger, staring at my face. Sarah would not play by herself and clung to my legs until I lifted her up and gave her a piece of dough to knead. I finished the dough and began to clean the table. The kitchen seemed to narrow—Ben filling more and more of it—and I flushed under his gaze. My hands trembled and I barely spoke: the dreams were coming loose. Ben seemed unperturbed by my silence. Finally I stuttered that Sarah and I were also expected at Sam's mother's house.

He reached over and took my floury hand, rubbed his fingers over my skin, then leaned across the table and kissed me on the cheek, hesitating after the kiss, breathing against the side of my face. A warm, familiar flush ran through to my legs.

He waited for my response. For a moment I was paralyzed, feeling his breath against me. I touched my fingers to my lips, thinking only *kiss*, forgetting everything but *kiss*. Then a small piece of dough slapped the floor. Sarah began to fuss, and suddenly I was three steps away from Ben, holding her. She buried her face in my dress.

"What is it honey? Are you ready to go to Nana's?"

Ben stepped back, licked his lips, dropped his gaze to the floor, glanced up at the clock. "I'll be back in town next week," he said.

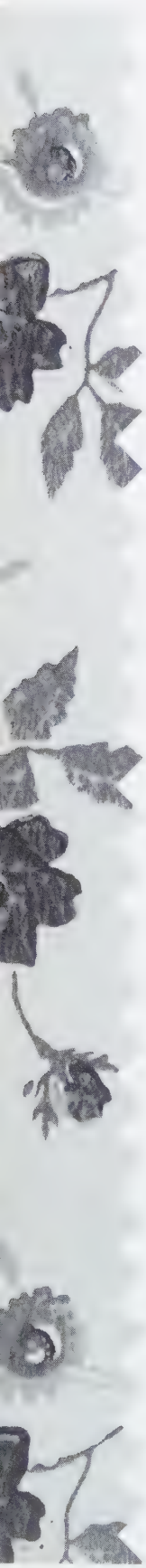
I spoke without thinking. "Good. We'll all see you then."

The next week I invited my mother-in-law and Sam's Uncle Irv to the house, and regularly began to fill our house with Sunday guests: my sister Sylvia and her husband Eli, Sam's cousins, friends from the neighborhood. This left no time for Ben to be alone with me. He barely disguised his impatience. He sulked and sent me imploring looks, but kept returning. I pretended to notice nothing. I did not explain to Sam my decision to invite other guests, nor did he ask. But finally the coldness that had come upon our marriage began to thaw.

> It was as if my husband smelled Ben on my skin.

Were it not for my sister Edie, we would have gone on with our Sunday afternoons, and forgotten those strange, confused weeks, perhaps forgotten even the desire that colored them. Ben would have drifted back to Rochester, married one of the spinster Rosenberg women or devoted himself to his children. But Edie. She was always an undeniable force in our world—awkward, provincial, headstrong. I can say now that she is the sister I loved the least, the one I found it hardest to protect. She alternately bullied the rest of us and crumbled into shyness so painful we rushed to her deliverance. Twice a week I visited her with Sarah; I'd solicit news of her first graders, her knowledge of child development. Around children Edie softened into a loving woman. Then I could tolerate her oddness and manipulations and in this way we could live as sisters. But she behaved poorly with Sam, fawning over him, sneering about his insurance job. At parties she remained mum or made unpredictable gaffs; holidays were marred by her sudden outbursts. I did not invite her to visit with Ben.

It was late October. Company filled the parlor—Ben, Sylvia, Eli, Sam's mother, Sylvia's two boys—when Edie walked in, opening the door without knocking, hauling a bushel of apples, Macs she'd bought at the farmer's market. The boys raced up and down the hallway, Sarah tagging after them. Ben smoked a cigarette and pretended to listen to Sam's mother, who was gossiping in Yiddish. "Oh



Edie," I said, "Hello." Ben's head swiveled like a weathervane in wild wind: forgetting, he scanned the room for the face of his own Edith. My sister waited, plump and pale, her glasses obscuring her wide hazel eyes. She set down the apples and scooped up Sarah, holding Sarah like a shield.

"You remember Ben Abrams?" I said.

Edie nodded and stared at the air to the right of Ben's face. "I'm sorry about your loss," she said. Her eyes darted to the left and then back to the smoke rising from his cigarette.

"Edie, doll, beautiful apples," Sam's mother said.

"Have one, " Edie said, "let me pick one out for you."

"Be sure to bake it. These teeth are too old."

"Oh." Sarah pulled at Edie's glasses, the thick frames angling down Edie's face, and Edie pried her fingers off the lenses. "Not the glasses, Sarah. I have a sweet for you." Sam's mother resumed her Yiddish stories. The boys began to shoot marbles in the hallway. Eli held apples up into the light and praised them.

I left for the kitchen. I could hear Sylvia making conversation, telling Ben that Edie was a teacher, asking what kind of apples the market offered. The sweet rolls on the stove had cooled and were ready to be served. I told myself that the apples were a kind gesture. But Edie knew better than to arrive unannounced, to enter my house without knocking. Sylvia would tell me to be grateful Edie hadn't done worse: as a young girl she'd thrown tantrums only our brother Manny could calm. The most soft-hearted among us, he was Edie's pet. At turns she lorded over our him and babied him. Well into adulthood she kept house for him as if he were her husband: outsiders mistook them for a married couple. Then Manny up and moved to Manhattan. Edie's small eccentricities mushroomed. She loitered in front of Manny's old bookstore. She wandered the streets at five a.m., Scrappy pink curlers hung in her hair as she went about her marketing. Rag dolls, baby dolls and stuffed animals began to fill her flat. I pretended they were for Sarah's benefit.

I stacked the sweet rolls on a platter and returned to the parlor. Chocolate stuck to Sarah's fingers and lips. I took her from Edie; she was tired, ready for her nap, and her small chubby arms curved tightly around my neck. Edie was already inching toward the door, Ben's gaze on her at full intensity. She did not say a word but glanced at Ben and awkwardly curtsied; it was a girl's gesture, one that didn't fit Edie anymore and one I hoped did not surface in other situations. From the window I watched her hurry down the block to her flat, an index finger in her mouth.

One evening a few weeks later, Edie arrived at our door carrying dresses: the maroon wool she wore at holidays, a plain navy shirtwaist, a beige suit a size too small. She wanted advice on what to wear to dinner with Ben. The back of my neck prickled.

"Maybe you should get something new," I said.

She frowned. "There isn't time. You don't like these, do you?"

I leaned against the parlor door. "These are fine. But why not treat yourself?"

"What should I do?" Agitation screwed up her face: her forehead pinched, her nose swelled, her lips flattened and slanted downward.

"Let me look at these," I said. "Would you check on Sarah?"

Her face reassembled itself, and she hurried down the hall to the nursery. I rifled through my bedroom closet. Most often Edie wore a size or two larger than mine, but with the pregnancies I'd acquired a range. Sam looked up from the insurance papers he had spread out over our bed. "What are you doing?"

"Finding a dress for Edie."

"Special occasion?"

I hesitated. "Maybe," I said. "I think she wants to try some new styles."

He shrugged. Edie had spurned two of his cousins, good if ordinary men, and he'd long since given up on her. "Couldn't hurt."

I lingered over an unattractive brown and white striped dress my mother-in-law had given me. Then I picked a green and white print that would bring out Edie's eyes, white beads, earrings. From outside the nursery I could hear Edie singing "Dedicated to You" to Sarah. Her beautiful, rich alto seemed to emanate from another body. I walked in the room and she let a verse drop. "Look who's here," she said to Sarah.

"Hi pumpkin." I kissed Sarah's chubby face. "Having a good time with Aunt Edie?" I held up the dress for Edie to examine. "I thought green might be a good color for you. Something to try."

She pressed it against herself, stroked the fabric. "You think so?"

"See if you like it. If not, wear the navy one and dress it up a bit, some beads or a scarf. You can borrow some of mine."

"Okay," Edie said, nodding too much. "Okay."

When she left I lay down on the sofa and closed my eyes, drifting until the I could almost feel Ben's hands.

There was a second date. After a month Edie stopped asking my advice and became more secretive about her meetings with Ben. I don't

know when their romance began in earnest. He shortened his visits to our flat, then stopped coming by. Edie stopped walking the neighborhood in curlers and put away her dolls. She bought a salmon lipstick. The talk began, at first lighthearted, not unkind. Ben and Edie had been seen walking together, nice for them. *She knows about loneliness, your sister,* women at the market told me. *She has some wisdom for this man.*

Then my sister Dora called to say she'd run into Edie and Ben at the pictures on a Saturday night. She mentioned the new lipstick.

"What about him?"

"Ben? Hair slicked back, a new suit. Not at all a widower. Sylvia says I should mind my own business but it's shameful, *scandalous*, his wife six months in the grave and the two of them running around like that."

I imagined Ben's body beneath the new suit, the tailored shirts and bleached underclothes slipping away, revealing pale skin, thick muscle, tangled patches of dark hair, heat. A sharp salt on my tongue. I bit a slice of lemon and waxed the parlor floor. Shame. Scandal. Trouble shaved itself on ordinary life, the line dividing them as fine as Sarah's hair. Everyone knew of Edie's loneliness. No one knew that Ben had kissed my face, or that he'd flown towards me in dreams and I had not run. No one but Sam had recognized the peculiar tone of Ben's visits to our flat, and Sam had come back to me. We were again a physical couple. Every night Sam held me, Sarah called to me, the child inside me rolled and kicked; there was simply no room for Ben. But in my private moments, he appeared.

No one knew that he'd flown to me in dreams and I had not run.

Edie was wrong for him, of course. And I knew she was unaccustomed to the attentions of men. I didn't caution her. He kissed her hand at dinner, the way he'd kissed mine, the way he'd kissed Edith Rosenberg, those warm lips pressing, lingering. She responded with gratitude, perhaps with lust: I couldn't bring myself to discuss him with her. For her part, Edie was too skittish to bring him up.

When I found Edith Rosenberg's pearls on Edie's bureau, I knew Ben was serious. There was no mistaking those drop earrings, that eighteen-inch strand—both too luminescent to be false. They lay in the open on her mirrored dresser tray, pearls and reflections of pearls adding up to opulence.

I touched them. Tentatively at first, tracing them with my fingertips. I pulled the strung pearls across the back of my hand, held them against my cheek and lips, lifted them into the light. My sister lumbered through the door. "Edie," I said.

We stood there for a moment, pearls shimmering between us. Then Edie tugged them from my hands and carefully laid them in a velvet case, her face expressionless.

This is my last image of Ben: He stands on the sidewalk, dapper, hands in his pockets, as if deciding whether or not to ring our front bell. Lake winds have kicked up and our street appears gray and abandoned. I set our empty milk bottles on the porch and call to him.

Ben? Are you looking for Edie? Ben?

What?

Are you seeing Edie this weekend?

Doffing his hat then, embarrassed.

How are you? Yes.

They did not wait until the anniversary of Edith Abrams' death, although Sylvia told Edie they should. This meant sacrifice. Edie had always weakened at the thought of white lace and rose-filled bouquets: over the years she'd built up a dowry with enough money for a satin gown and a large reception. But Ben arranged a quiet ceremony in Rochester, performed by the rabbi who had married him to Edith Rosenberg. I doubt my Edie argued. No one else intervened on her behalf. My sister Dora traveled to Rochester, but I was well into my eight month by the wedding date, confined to bed. Sylvia's youngest was ill. When Dora returned, she said little: the flowers were lovely. Ben's children did not attend.

During the last weeks of my pregnancy I napped in the afternoons, Sarah beside me, kicking in her sleep. I would wake imagining Ben's bed, where Edie slept. She had never felt a man's touch over the whole of her body. I pictured Ben, patient, amorous. He would kiss her face, her shoulders, her hands. Slowly, quietly, he'd trace the contours of her body. He'd embrace her. For the first time since girlhood, she would feel desirable. Her intense shyness would give way to the fierce, blind coupling that would irrevocably bind her to him.

I grimaced; I could not sustain such generosity. Other visions rose up in me. I knew that Edie desparately needed Ben's tenderness and would be crushed by his indifference, but that knowledge did not move me. For a time I decided the fault would lay with her: Edie would remain trapped by her own shyness. Ben might beseech her, but she was too fearful to let him touch her. Their marriage would be chaste from the start.

Or perhaps Edie would let him touch her, but would not relax enough to take pleasure in their intimacy. Ben, seeing this, would close his eyes and tried to imagine a more responsive woman. As time went on, his imaginings would take the place of the flesh and blood Edie.

I chastised myself for these thoughts. Then I would grant her the children, the two girls and the little boy, who having lost their mother must have been lost themselves. But I pictured crumpled, faceless girls howling when they heard Ben say the name Edie, his pet name for their mother. I pictured the two year old wailing. More likely the girls screamed at nothing, said nothing, complied with Edie's every request. Edie would fear for them. The boy would have clung to Edie, not allowing her out of his sight. And Edie would equal the attachment. This seemed acceptable to me: Edie would spend all of her time with the children, Ben with his furniture.

In less selfish moods, I realized that the fact of this marriage, less than a year after Edith Rosenberg's death, must have been scandal to everyone in Rochester. I imagined the neighbors appalled at Ben, who seemed to be replacing one Edie with another, the Rosenbergs mortified and unkind. And after our Edie was seen wearing the drop pearls? The family would stop speaking to him. Here my thoughts of Edie would soften. What friends would she have? Her marriage, begun with tenderness and hope, would quickly deteriorate. A tragedy.

And the final tragic moment would arrive quietly, after supper, Edie alone, rinsing plates and finally realizing what everyone else had and Ben had not: that he was still desperately in love with Edith Rosenberg and that his heart had no room for any other kind of Edith.

I knew I was tainted by envy: my mind would not allow Edie happiness. I never spoke of this. I did not interfere.

I was tainted by envy: my mind would not allow Edie happiness.

When my labor began, Edie bought a train ticket and reappeared in Buffalo. She wore a plain woolen dress, no lipstick. Through a long, difficult labor, Edie stayed beside me, holding my hand, speaking to me the way she spoke to Sarah, to the children in her classes, in the most secure and soothing of voices. Jacob was born red and wrinkled and fierce, and Edie, in the days of my exhaustion, walked him through the flat and sang to him, sprawled on the floor with Sarah and drew castles while he slept, cooked our meals, and watched over all of us while Sam was off at work.

After a week she told me she was not returning to Rochester.

"What?"

"I'll stay in Buffalo now."

"He's your *husband*," I said.

I realized then that she was not wearing her ring. She shook her head. "I'll teach again in September. I'll find another flat."

"What happened?"

"Your Jacob, he needs a little sun. See the yellow on him?"

"Edie, what are you telling me?"

A momentary dullness fell over her face. "I'll start the wash now."

I tried once more and got a low, imperious, "I'm staying put." She said nothing more. She smiled and stroked Jacob's head. It was then that the weight of my visions pulled me to earth, and I felt my blood and bones crush inward. I slipped to the floor, dizzy with the poison of my curses on her marriage. Edie observed me, distant, curious. "Think about what you want for supper," she said. She placed Jacob in my arms and left the room. He was not crying.

I buried my questions alongside my wayward desires. Some evenings I prayed. Edie and I returned to our habits, our weekday teas, our talk of children and infants, our guarded pleasantries. In winter Sam shovelled her walkway. In spring she helped plant our garden. Our middle years spread before us and we entered each one as if Ben had never walked through our lives, as if there had been no other Edith, as if nothing but love lay in our heart of hearts. □

Nancy Reisman teaches writing at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and the Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has appeared in Glimmer Train and is forthcoming in American Fiction and Toyon. She grew up near Buffalo, New York.

Raised in a secretive, savage and virulently anti-religious family in rural England in the 1950's,

Louise Kehoe

(winner of the 1995 National Jewish Book Award for her memoir *In This Dark House*, and soon to be the subject of a BBC documentary)

converts

to Judaism 40 years later.

Why?

In 1939, at the pinnacle of an eminent career as an avant-garde architect, Russian-born Berthold Lubetkin, not yet forty years old, stunned his peers by leaving his practice in London and moving with his wife to World's End, a desolate farm in rural England.

This move was only one more step away from the truth about his past, already buried beneath a shroud of lies meant to protect him from the curiosity of his own three children. Denied the barest facts of their father's personal history, his children had no way of explaining his eccentric and volatile behavior: charm and wit mixed unpredictably with emotional and physical abuse. Loving him and hating him in shifting measure, they could never know him. Until after his death at the age of eighty-eight; when his youngest daughter, Louise, began slowly to discover the tragic truth he'd been hiding all his life—a truth that would become the heart of her own.

Having been born and raised in England, where church and state are inseparably intertwined and Christianity is taught in schools alongside the three Rs, I have to admit to being hopelessly biased against the term 'conversion.' To me, there's a distinct whiff of evangelism about it, an odor of sin and salvation which makes me decidedly uneasy. As I see it, conversion is what people do when they want to reinvent themselves, to be born again (as though once weren't enough) or to protect themselves against the

threat of spending eternity being barbecued in the fires of Hell. Conversion is what happened to the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, who experienced a vision of Jesus and thereafter abruptly renounced Judaism, changed his name, and became Saint Paul, perhaps the most famous and influential anti-Semitic Jew of all time (with the possible exception of Karl Marx).

What happened when I became a Jew was not conversion. Yes, it was a religious and spiritual experience; yes, it was a crossroads in my life—a Rubicon, even, for there is no going back. And yes, I am passionate about Judaism, and full of fervent commitment, but if you'll pardon my pedantry, I still doggedly maintain that conversion isn't the right word to describe the process of becoming a Jew.

It's not just a question of changing one's religion. In my case, for example, I didn't have a religious affiliation before I became Jewish. My parents were communists and militant atheists who shunned all manifestations of religion and mysticism, and taught me to do likewise—an attitude which got me into endless trouble at my solidly Protestant school. I well remember the awful occasion on which I was hauled out before the entire school, assembled in the auditorium, and made to apologize publicly for having referred to the Holy Ghost in the derisive way my father always did, as the Holy Goat. I regard it as no small miracle that I developed a sense of the divine at all, let alone that it survived the ideological browbeating to which I was subjected as a child. But survive it did, a timid and denominationless conviction that there was more to life than science alone could explain, and that human beings were not the alpha and the omega.

4-year-old Berthold Lubetkin.

Having learned very early that this secret and faceless deity of mine paid no attention to my requests for material goodies, and obstinately ignored pleas for retribution to be visited swiftly and painfully upon my enemies, I came to expect very little from it other than silent companionship. As to what the deity expected of me, if anything, I could only guess. Christian teaching had it that Hell awaited the unsaved, and with my inherited tendency toward irreverence and skepticism, not to mention my formidable track record for blasphemy, I had little doubt that 'the unsaved' included me. However, pragmatic to the core, I put future damnation out of my mind and turned my attention firmly to the present, reasoning in my childish way that God didn't sound like the sort to harbor grievances, and wouldn't have any interest in roasting me later if I did what I could to make the world a bit better in the here and now. And another thing I knew, although I very wisely shut up about it: God was God, and Jesus was a man. You see, even then I was a Jew in my soul.

What I discovered only recently, though, was that Jewishness was in my blood as well.

"Happy families are all alike," wrote Tolstoy, "but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." My family's way sprang from one rich, deep source: the inner anguish of my father, a man who strove diligently, and at enormous personal cost, to conceal his past and his true identity.

The story my parents told me was this: that my father, who was born in Tsarist Russia, had come to England in 1930 and settled there after completing his professional education in Europe, at the universities of Warsaw, Paris and Berlin. His family had all been killed in the Russian Revolution of 1917, my mother revealed. It was a subject too painful for him to talk about, she said, and I believed her. Indeed, I assumed that it was because of the enduring, bitter grief he felt about the fate of his family that he had become such an irascible and difficult man.

For he was a terrible father. Irritable, tyrannical, and capable of savage cruelty to those around him, he seemed to teeter permanently on the brink of rage. Never knowing when the next volcanic eruption might take place, I tiptoed around him and did my utmost to appease him, constantly trying to achieve perfection in whatever I did in order to be able to bring a fresh sacrifice to his feet. But nothing satisfied him: I could never be good enough to win more than fleeting praise, momentary acceptance. What made him behave this way? Even my mother seemed powerless to explain, offering me only the opaque and exasperating bromide that if I just knew him—really knew him, as she did—then I would understand. What she was alluding to, I later realized, was the secret of his hidden past, a secret to which only she was privy, and which, in her loyalty to him, she had sworn to uphold. She died without ever breathing a word of what she knew.

It wasn't until my father's death five years ago that the truth finally emerged. He left documents which proved beyond doubt that he and his entire family were Jewish, and that his parents, far from having perished in the Russian Revolution, had fled to Poland in 1918, and were still living there when the Nazis invaded in 1939. Along with tens of thousands of other Jews, they were herded into the Warsaw Ghetto and deported from there to their deaths.

The discovery of my hidden Jewish ancestry had a profound effect on me. Forty years old at the time of my father's death, I had arrived at middle age still

dragging the baggage of my unhappy childhood, chafing and stumbling under its formidable weight. Now, suddenly, and for the first time, I could see my father the way my mother had always hoped I would: with a measure of compassion and understanding instead of anger and resentment; and it was in doing so that I was finally able to leave my childhood behind and move on, unencumbered.

But liberation from the past, however welcome and long overdue, was by no means the only or the most important aspect of the unexpected legacy which my father had left. The grandparents I had never known, whose murder had never been acknowledged or mourned in my family, cried out to me from the few pitiful photographs my father had deliberately left behind for his children to find. I felt a need that bordered on hunger to know these people, to connect with them, however belatedly. I began reading everything I could lay my hands on concerning Jewish history, culture, and tradition, both secular and religious. I saw that wherever human beings had struggled for progress and social justice, more often than not Jews had been the catalyst, and I saw how everywhere the Jewish people had been, in every age, hatred had followed them, from the New Testament to the Nuremberg Laws, from Martin Luther to Auschwitz.

Louise Kehoe

The more I read, the more eager I became to know more. My burgeoning library of Judaica soon outgrew my office and began eating up shelf space in every other room in the house. It seemed to me that something was coming alive in me that had long been dormant and inaccessible, as though a part of me which had been lost for so long had now at last been restored to me. Like someone recovering from amnesia, I greeted each new nugget of unfolding Jewish knowledge with a curious sense of *déjà vu*, recognizing not only my father in what I read, but myself as well. For the forces that had molded him and shaped his outlook were Jewish forces: the inherited wisdom and experience of centuries of Jewish life, suffering and survival had imprinted themselves upon him, and it was that same Jewish ethos, impervious to his attempts to stifle it, that had come down, through him, to me.

How could I have been so blind? I wondered, remembering the myriad small ways in which he gave clues as to his origins, how he would sometimes preface a remark with an impatient '*Nu*', how he occasionally swore in Yiddish (he told me it was German). I remembered how he sometimes brought back from London beautiful, shiny loaves of braided bread, whose taste and texture were so different from the bland white pablum which passed for bread in England in those days. "It's Polish bread," he said; and why would I doubt his word? I couldn't have known that it was challah, nor that in buying and eating it he was taking a furtive and lonely trip back to his buried past. Living as we did in the wilds of rural England, I had never met anyone Jewish to compare him with—and even if I had I would have concluded that these were Russian or European habits, not specifically Jewish ones: he had, after all, lived in many countries and spoke five languages fluently. Besides, my parents had categorically denied my father's Jewish ancestry, and just to drive the message home they took the precaution of condemning Israel as a Zionist pawn of U.S. Imperialism, and castigated Judaism as an antiquated and pernicious philosophy. How well I recall my father telling me to be grateful that I hadn't been born into a Jewish family, where menstruation was considered unclean and men began their morning prayers by thanking God for not making them female.

But Jewishness is one skeleton which deeply resents being shut in the closet; indeed, it's a rare closet that can manage to contain a Jewish skeleton for more than one generation. And although my parents had locked and bolted the door, stuffed the keyhole with superglue and duct-taped all around the doorjamb, that skeleton would simply not resign itself to the darkness. My birthright had been stolen from me, and I was determined to win it back.

"The Gerim Institute offers a 24- week course in Jewish Life, Thought and Practice. Tuition includes the cost of books, and, in the event of conversion, *mikveh,* and token circumcision for male applicants. To enroll, complete this form, obtain the signature of your sponsoring rabbi, and return, together with check for tuition, to the Institute." And then, almost as an afterthought: "Press hard: you are making four copies."

I looked at the form. Name, address, telephone number; married or single, widowed or divorced; religion born into; current religious affiliation—and then, above an intimidatingly vast acreage of empty lines, the most important question of all: "Reason for considering conversion?"

What would I say? How would I explain my extraordinary journey, a journey which had begun in anti-Semitic Imperial

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Russia long before I was born, and had brought me all the way to the foot of Mount Sinai? I picked up the pen, and, pressing hard enough to make ten copies, let alone a paltry four, I wrote the simple truth: "With all my heart I want to be a Jew, and what's more I think God agrees with me."

When you immerse yourself in a *mikveh*, you must be as naked as the day you were born. Nothing must come between you and the water, not even a wedding ring.

In the twenty years my husband and I have been married, I have only once removed my wedding ring, and that was on the day I went to the *mikveh* to solemnize my acceptance into the Jewish family. I saw a shadow cross my husband's face as he watched me struggling to remove this symbol of our unbreakable union, and I well understood why. He grew up in a devoutly Catholic family and had been educated at a school run by the Christian Brothers, a strict order given to instilling religious orthodoxy by means of sheer terror. Although not an atheist, he viewed all religions with profound skepticism, seeing them as more or less pernicious variants of the spiritual and intellectual straitjacket from which he had so strenuously fought free. Never having encountered Judaism before, he imagined that it was simply Christianity without Christ; just another set of dogmas and dire warnings, same hymn, different tune. It amazed him, just as it had amazed me when I first began my Jewish journey, how blissfully free of dogma, how disputatious and how intellectually demanding Judaism is. Like me, he was enthralled with the notion that one is commanded to wrestle with God, to acknowledge one's doubts and work through them rather than feeling overwhelmed with guilt for one's lack of faith. The humanness of it, the practical wisdom, the passionate moral foundation of Jewish teaching—these things drew him to Judaism as they had me. He began attending services with me from time to time in the small, egalitarian *shul* to which I now belong. He has not become Jewish himself (the *brit milah* is a formidable deterrent for an uncircumcised man in his late forties) and I, in keeping with Jewish tradition, absolutely refuse to proselytize. All that matters to me is to be able to share with him the enormous happiness that the discovery of my Jewishness has brought to me, and the delight I feel in being a part, however small, of the long, proud march of Jewish history.

No: conversion isn't the right word. Converting implies change, and I didn't change. I just became more fully what I had always been. And far from being angry with my father for denying me my Jewish birthright, I am actually profoundly grateful; for in doing so he inadvertently bequeathed me one of the greatest opportunities I could ever have hoped for: the enormous privilege of choosing, of my own free will and with all my heart, to become a Jew. □

Bible Lessons

For my daughters

BY DAVI WALDERS

It all began, you see, with her chanting
Hagar at the Bat Mitzvah I didn't have
and was damn sure my daughter would have
and although she still hasn't forgiven me
I'm glad I got someone started somewhere.

It didn't stop there and still hasn't
and today, ten years later, I just read up
on Rahab, between Joshua and Jericho,
in case you didn't know, and that led to
her daughter, Huldah, who said some things

to King Josiah who was having problems too,
and I still haven't gotten totally straight
on Hagar. Well, did she and Sarah fight
or not, and if so, which one was at fault,
and where exactly did Abraham fit in

or was he just sitting around like Adam
waiting for some woman to blame it all on?
Before I could settle with Hagar, long after
my daughter had gone to college, I'd gotten
involved in Sarah's laughing, which is of grave

concern when you think of a fertile octogenarian
pregnancy and both G-d and Abraham on her back.
I was feeling so relieved that Isaac wasn't
sacrificed and that Hagar made it through
the desert a second time with G-d's help dowsing,

that I thought I could skip a few generations
without worrying too much about Rebecca, but then
knowing what she went through thinking of a world
led by hairy red men grunting and hunting all
the time, it's no wonder she reversed the twins

and sent Jacob off to find Rachel, because Esau
surely couldn't have handled all the trouble with
those twelve sons and all that labor and begetting
while Rachel waited. What I can't understand is why
Jacob couldn't have given Dinah a little more time

and encouragement, after all, she was his only
daughter, and look at all the trouble he had from
those sons slaughtering everyone. You would think
one of them could have kept an eye out for her
or shared a field or taught her to pot or fish

or talked to her. I mean I ask the rabbi why
these women are always raped, and tell him how tired
I get always hearing how Isaac's salvation stopped
child sacrifice when Jephtha's poor daughter steps
out of her house a thousand years later and, blam,

she's a gonner too, just like that, and her father
calls her a troubler and doesn't even tell us her name.
Well, the rabbi's pretty busy, so I get some more books
and keep thinking about things. It just goes on and on
and I keep reading about harlots, and I wonder about

that too, especially when I think of Bathsheba minding
her own business, just stepping out of the mikvah,
trying to stay clean, but somehow, in every movie, she
looks like a floozy in red, like she's the one who seduced
David. There are probably people who would blame Jephtha's

mother for her poor grand-daughter's demise, because—
you guessed it—Mom was a harlot, too, just like
I was saying about today and my reading up on Rahab.
I mean the first thing you get is she's a harlot, too,
not that she hides Joshua's spies, and is one brave

woman, defying that king. Who knows if those walls
would have tumbled just on time without her help
and those scarlet ribbons she tied. So before I knew
it, I was reading about her daughter, Huldah, who,
in case you didn't know, was one of the seven women

prophets, and I spent the whole day trying to track
them all down because there's no list in the Encyclopedia
Judaica. So I end up thinking about Deborah and Miriam
and I get stuck on Miriam's leprosy. I mean was she
ever really sick for a while for just musing on Moses'

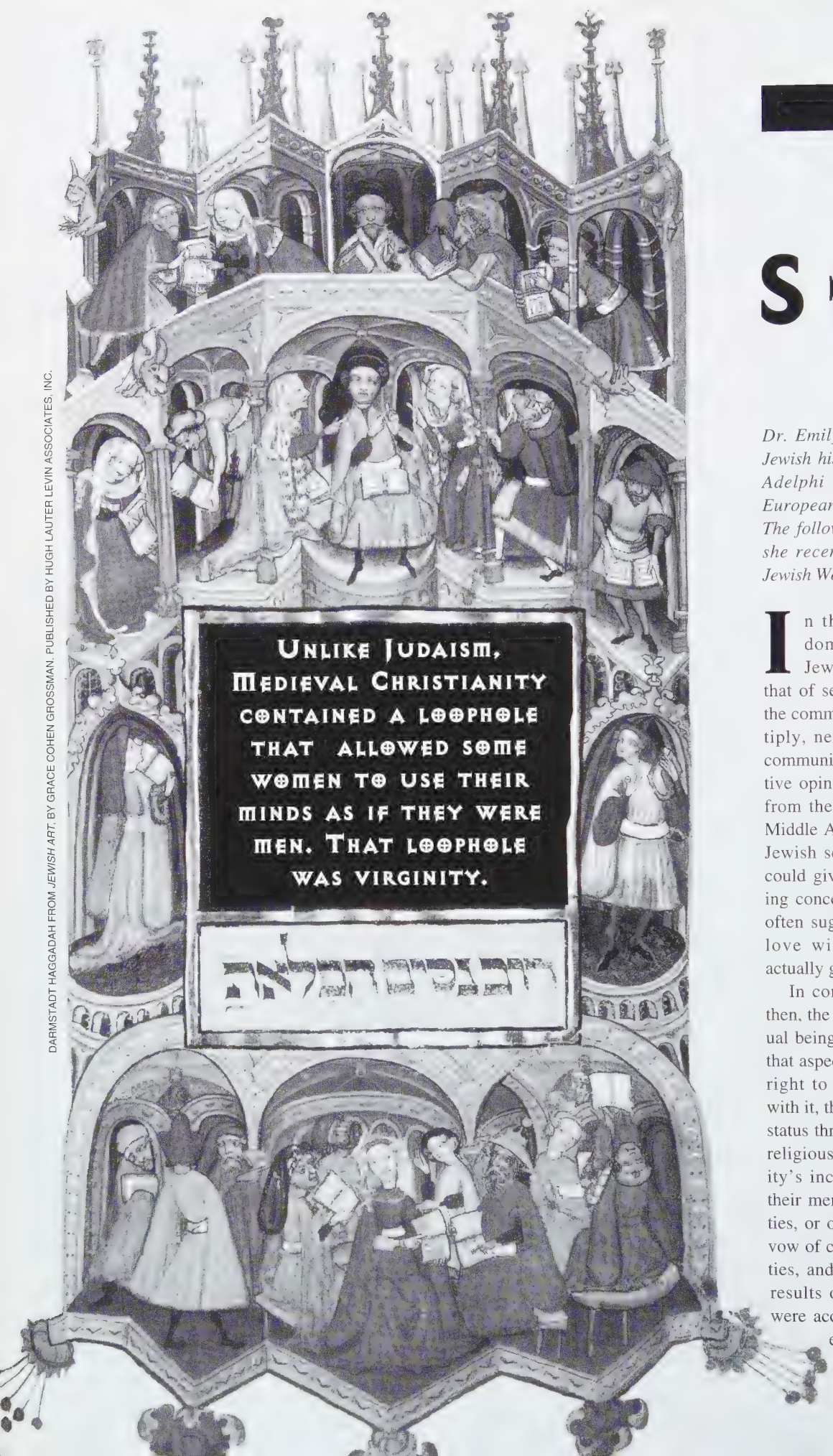
problems with women, which I think a sister has every
right to do with a brother suffering so. Then I
finally get back to work on Huldah. When she tries
to help Josiah, she gets this lousy name, weasel, just
because she calls him a man rather than king, even after

she tells him what G-d wants, just like a prophet ought
to do. Well, the main and only thing may be that when I
said to my daughter you will study Torah and she said why
and I said because I didn't get to, and then she got lots
of gifts and Bibles for learning so much and she said I'll

keep the gifts, you take the Bibles, well the main thing may
be that even with all these good Books, good rabbis and good
questions, it's still hard getting it all straightened out
at my advanced age and it probably would have been a helluva
lot easier if women had been included in the first place.

Davi Walders is a poet and educational consultant living in Maryland. Her work has appeared in Ms., Seneca Review, *and* Crossroads: The Journal of Religion.

Illustration from Drawing on the Bible: Biblical Women in Art *by Beth K. Haber (Biblio Press, 1996) which features engravings and prints of women from the 15th to the 19th centuries, biblical texts and Haber's commentary.*


UNLIKE JUDAISM, MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY CONTAINED A LOOPHOLE THAT ALLOWED SOME WOMEN TO USE THEIR MINDS AS IF THEY WERE MEN. THAT LOOPHOLE WAS VIRGINITY.

DARMSTADT HAGGADAH FROM *JEWISH ART*, BY GRACE COHEN GROSSMAN. PUBLISHED BY HUGH LAUTER LEVIN ASSOCIATES, INC.

JEWI

SEX

Dr. Emily Taitz, a scholar of mediev Jewish history, is an adjunct professor Adelphi University where she teach European history and women's studie The following is excerpted from a pap she recently delivered at Ma'yan, T Jewish Women's Project in New York Ci

In the Middle Ages, one of t domains in which Christian a Jewish social values differed w that of sex. The value of marriage, a the commandment to be fruitful and mu tiply, never diminished in the Jewi community in spite of the strongly neg tive opinions about sexuality emanati from the Christian church. In fact, t Middle Ages was the time of the earli Jewish sex manual, detailing how m could give women pleasure, thus ens ing conception. By contrast, the Chur often suggested that couples who ma love with too much pleasure we actually guilty of the sin of adultery.

In comparison to Christian wom then, the Jewish woman's value as a s ual being was high. But in exchange that aspect of her high status, she lost t right to remain unmarried, and alo with it, the opportunity to gain renown status through scholarship or outstandi religious commitment. From Christia ity's inception, some women, throu their membership in religious commu ties, or occasionally, merely by takin vow of chastity, enjoyed such opportu ties, and their visions, ideas and/or results of their studies and leaders were accepted and respected by follo ers of both sexes.

There are many examples such women—for example,

TRADE-OFF: SCHOLARSHIP?

BY EMILY TAITZ

amatist and scholar Hroswitha of ndersheim (b. 935); the composer and ter, the Abbess Hildegarde of Bingen 1098); the religious writer, Elisabeth Schonau (12th Century); Clare of sisi (b. 1193), the founder of the Poor ires, a religious order of women; and mystics Mechtilde of Magdeburg (b. 2) and Beatrijs van Tienen (b. 1200). Of course, there were also examples Jewish women scholars during those ne centuries. In spite of the generally cepted prohibition against teaching law to women, many women were ght, either because there were no ns in the family or because they sorbed the lessons given to their thers in the home. However, even most accomplished of these women re less public, and therefore less nous, than the outstanding Christian men scholars and holy women who netimes had large followings. There re also Jewish women who taught y other women, but these scholars re generally overlooked by male oniclers and historians.

Jewish women who wanted to be ependent scholars were caught in a al and social "Catch 22" which made uine scholarly renown, such as was oyed by men, next to impossible for m. Since the norm for a Jewish man was modesty (*tzniut*), any navior which might be construed as modest, such as being outspoken, tradicting a male scholar, or appear- in a public role, immediately placed outside the realm of propriety. cause of this, many accomplished men scholars may have remained npletely unknown outside their own households. A few others managed to earn limited fame and to maintain modesty by using their erudition in a more private way or by dint of their having lived in the household of a great scholar.

Rashi's daughters and granddaughters were consulted on legal matters because it was assumed they knew, by default, of his practices and decisions. Dulcie, the wife of the great Rabbi Eleazar HaRokeah, was active in the synagogue and taught other women prayers and songs. The woman cantor, Urania of Worms, herself the daughter of a cantor, was praised for her "sweet tunefulness" in leading the women in prayer. In northern Italy the learned Paula dei Mansi and Miriam Shapira Luria, both 13th century scholars from long lines of scholarly families, were especially erudite. Paula was an accomplished scribe and scholar, but she limited herself to composing commentaries for books she transcribed for the private use of male relatives. Miriam, one of a handful of women who enjoyed the prestige of teaching men, did so from behind a lattice, again in the interests of modesty.

Such limitations placed on women's public scholarship for the avowed reason of helping men to avoid sexual thoughts or deeds, or to prevent them from being distracted from study, are not unique to the Jewish community. Christians held the very same views, and the vast majority of their learned women taught and ruled behind the thick walls of convents, isolated from all men, teaching mainly other women. But Christianity contained a loophole that allowed some women to function *as if they were men*. That loophole was their proclaimed virginity. A woman could be saved from her inferior, female status by renouncing her sexuality and becoming like a man.

Evidence of that attitude can be seen repeatedly throughout history. In her short career, Joan of Arc was consistently referred to as a maid or a virgin. Queen Elizabeth I of England, a strong and successful ruler, was called "the virgin queen." In fact, the word virgin was erroneously believed to have its roots in the Latin *vir*, meaning *man*. Therefore, women who totally renounced their sexual role in society could function as men—if they proved themselves especially able or exceptionally devout.

Jewish women could not renounce their sexuality. It was too important to the Jewish community and to the laws by which Jewish men bound themselves. Virginity was never a value for Jews, and it did not become so in Europe. And yet, Jews living in Christian Europe could not help but absorb some of those influences. Rather than accepting them *in toto* however, they modified them. Instead of virginity, they adapted the idea that women, in the rare instances when they were teaching men, must temporarily neutralize their sexuality by hiding from view. This concession maintains the traditional requirement of modesty, and lies halfway between two extremes: on the one hand the belief held by Christians that scholarly religious women had to be asexual, and on the other hand the Jewish prohibition against educating women. Such an adaptation allowed extraordinary women to function as scholars and teachers, in public roles, by hiding their sexual bodies from a vulnerable male population. □

Testimonies of The Young and the Naked

TO BE REAL: TELLING THE TRUTH AND CHANGING THE FACE OF FEMINISM
Edited and with an Introduction by Rebecca Walker
Foreword by Gloria Steinem; afterword by Angela Davis [Anchor Books, $12.95]

Alice Walker's daughter (a.k.a.—but almost never—Mel Leventhal's daughter) edits this book of 23 essays, most by feminists in their twenties. With titles such as "Born to Dyke," "Sexism and the Art of Feminist Hip-Hop Maintenance," and "Testimony of a Naked Woman" (an extraordinary, developmentally honest essay by Jocelyn Taylor, one of the founders of the Clit Club), these young feminists intend to show that their world is indeed different from the world of us old, cane-swinging feminists.

Deriding Second Wave feminism ("party-pooping rigidity") as well as Power Feminism ("white Superwomen who have children at home being cared for by West Indian nannies"), one essayist, Danzy Senna, is fairly representative of this book's cohort: "Being the daughter of a white socialist mother and a black intellectual father, it seemed that everyone and everything had come together for my conception, only to break apart in time for my birth. I was left with only questions. To Be or Not to Be: black, Negro, African-American, feminist, femme, mulatto, quadroon, lesbian, straight, bisexual, lipstick, butch bottom, femme top, vegetarian, carnivore?"

Several essayists describe the agonies of being raised by feminist mothers (if you *are* a feminist mother, don't get defensive; these insights are a gift). Explains Jeannine Delombard, "I understood, listening to 'William Wants a Doll' on my *Free to Be You and Me* record, that for a boy to plead for a baby doll was daring and original, while for a girl to do so would be old-fashioned and unimaginative."

Naomi Wolf, in "Brideland," adds to the generational divide. "As brides, unlike with our boyfriends at the beach, we are hard to unbutton, to get at, to even feel through the whaleboning. We are made into treasures again, and jewels adorn our breasts. In white, we retrieve our virginity, which means metaphorically, the original specialness of sexual access to us. In Brideland," she writes approvingly, "men worship the goddess of female sexuality once again. How barren the world is for women," she laments, "when female sexuality is stripped of its aura."

Jason Schultz (one of three male essayists in the book) deconstructs—in high jargon and with much self-congratulation—a feminist bachelor party he once painstakingly hosted. Strippers jumping out of cakes was verboten, explains Schultz, so he was challenged to find socially redeeming alternative programming. His solution is to facilitate honest, deep male conversation at the party ("different from typical sexist male dialogues"), ranging from discussions about "the many uses of cock rings to the issue of consent within S/M and B&D acts to methods of achieving multiple male orgasms." I don't know what a cock ring is (and I don't *want* to know, actually). Still, my heart goes out (*nebbech*) to Jason Schultz.

"Though I'm female, in cyberspace I really feel like a gay man: the desire is 'instinctual,' the performance 'natural.'"

Finally, a brilliant feminist angle on cybersex (by Mocha Jean Herrup) posits that "the anxiety of genderbending on-line is not simply about the fear of deception, it is also about the fear of chaos ambiguity." Herrup argues positively cyberspace sex as putting forth a fem "politics of ambiguity" that "requires the fronts of activism be rethough broaden the definition of social change lesbian, Herrup describes how, neverthe she wants to stretch her experience enjoying gay male sex, and so she logs her simulated environment as "Jami helpless boy, donning leather, chains a dog collar, being led around by an ol stronger, demanding master." Wr Herrup, "I enjoy being a helpless boy. sex is about blow-jobs, erections, stimulation—none of which have ever a part of my sex life. In cyberspace," He concludes challengingly, "I really *feel* li gay man: the desire is 'instinctual,' performance 'natural.'"

If you're a feminist over 40, this bo definitely worth reading—both for many essays that are dazzling Elizabeth Mitchell's on dolls) as well a those that broadcast many young ad frantic, groping search for "self"—c acted out through the fetishization of This book will remind the older emp reader that being young, especially in cold glaring post-modern world, ca really hard. My bet is that by the Rebecca Walker hits 30, she'll have interest in much of this material.

—*Susan Sc*

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ROSS AND A STAR:
ioirs of a Jewish Girl in Chile

arjorie Agosin [University of New Mexico Press
95.]

his collection of beautifully written
ettes, Agosin [LILITH's Winter 1991
er woman] relates her mother's
riences as a Jewish girl growing up in
rno, Chile. Drawing upon her own
ories of childhood in Chile, as well as
nother's and aunts', she describes her
ier's encounter with the poet Gabriela
ral, the 1945 Nobel Prize Winner.
chool teacher from northern Chile,
ral strongly identified with the Jewish
ple. Though respected for her writing,
was surrounded by controversy because
er status as a single woman, feminist,
pacifist.

I don't know why the teachers chose me
esent Gabriela Mistral with the bouquet
oses and violets on the day that she
led through Osorno. Some evil and
erse tongues said that it was because
iela Mistral liked Jews, that she wrote
t the Jewish people; others, the more
cent, said that it was because I was a sweet little blonde with little blue eyes. Then I looked at them with a nostalgia that was vague and distant. I only thought about how nice it would be to wear a dress made of blue percale and how I would loosen my hair to recite a poem of hers....

When Gabriela Mistral arrived, the school became solemn and silent. She had green eyes and a displaced gaze; she wore a long skirt and men's shoes. I approached her and gave her the bouquet of freshly cut flowers. And she kissed me on my cheeks drenched in sweat and shame. From that moment on I loved her because everyone also laughed at her and called her a dirty Jew, an ugly lesbian and friend of the unfortunate Indians.

Years later I learned that Dona Gabriela was a teacher to my aunts in Temuco who belonged to one of the oldest and most distinguished Jewish colonies in Chile. Mistral talked to them about love and about the Jewish race; she gave them a sense of belonging in a sacred history and she spoke to them about usurped identity.

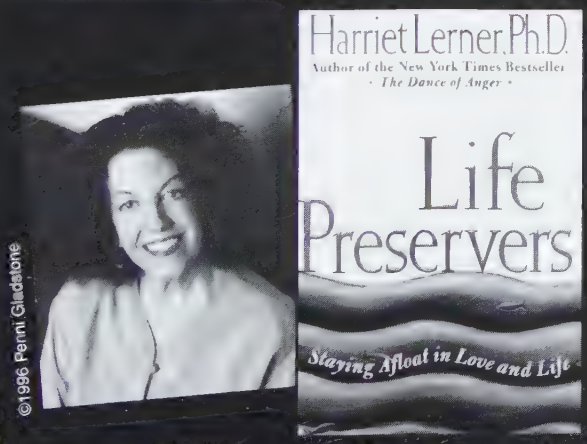
—Lisa Lepson

To mark LILITH's 20th anniversary (the fun begins in the Fall), would you like to host a LILITH gathering in your community? Here are some ideas:

- You can gather friends to watch a segment of the upcoming PBS series "Genesis" (try a segment that deals with women's stories) and then discuss the program along with a packet we'll provide: "Meet the Matriarchs"—a collection of LILITH articles on women's roles in the Bible. Everyone who comes to your party is invited to give 5 gift subscriptions to LILITH (to a student, a best friends, a mentor, a library)
- LILITH editors will be speaking around the country. You can invite LILITH speakers to address issues in your community, or you can host a LILITH gathering—a benefit or coffee party or salon—to follow an already scheduled LILITH appearance.

Please call (212) 757-0818 to find out what kinds of material LILITH can provide for your event, and to talk about ways LILITH's extraordinary Talent Bank of Jewish women can help you plan other events.

Q.— Where can I find short answers to life's big questions?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Mazel: A Novel

by Rebecca Goldstein, [Viking $23.95]

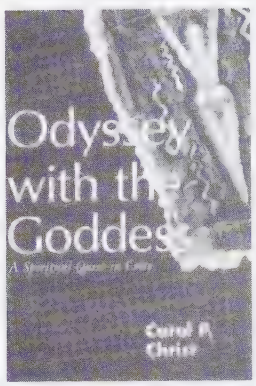
Do you remember how delicious it was to read E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*? Here's the Jewish, feminist, European-inflected equivalent--full of pleasure rather than dread, and I couldn't put it down.

Goldstein--whose first novel, *The Mind-Body Problem*, I loved for its humor and its insights into the workings of brainy women always smitten by intellectual men--has given us, here, more of the women themselves. A newly religious young Princeton mathematics professor about to have her first baby. Her mother, a cerebral Columbia classics professor. Her grandmother, appearing on the scene in a newly-frum New Jersey town to await the appearance of the next generation.

It's the grandmother who bolts us into our seats for the duration of the tale. Sasha believes in chance, not fate, and in the randomness of human events that makes for theater. She grew up in an Eastern Eur shtetl, imbedded in its mud as its Orth practices were imbedded in her own actions. (Saving a baby brother drowning, she pulls at his trousers; come off in her hand, so she immed drops them to the ground, since forbidden to carry anything on Shabbos

And so it goes, until a sister's tra compellingly told in scenes that evoke life in the 1920's so vividly that w almost smell the *treyf* meat on the oper propels the family into the wider wo Warsaw. Our heroine meets her Jud version of Auntie Mame, becomes a s the experimental Yiddish theater an center of a circle of European Je intellectuals, including (here's the Doc touch), peripherally, Isaac Bashevis S Sasha's odyssey to the Upper West even her waltzing at the Colu University student sit-ins in the late 1 all occur while she is trying to figure o mazel, the luck or chance, that seems shaping her world.

--Susan Weidman Schu



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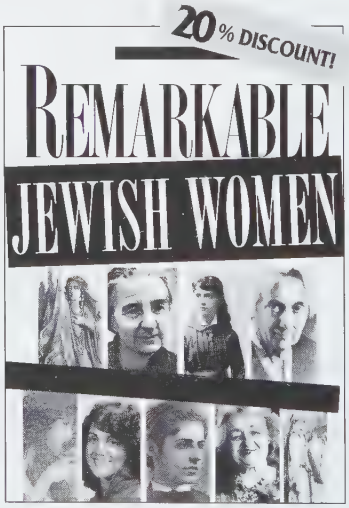

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"Other"
York Jewish Intellectuals
by Carole S. Kessner, [NYU Press, $20]

fascinating anthology fills in lacunae in the ry of our North American Jewish sense of selves, with 15 biographies of leading enated Jewish intellectual leaders of this ury. Unlike luminaries like Saul Bellow and d Kazin, courted as returning celebrities by ewish community, these "other" New York sh intellectuals didn't need the clarion call he 1967 Six Day War to wake up their sh identities. They had for decades been ng and lecturing on the challenges of a nitted Jewish spiritual and communal life, often without the recognition accorded disaffected Jews.

wo women "opinion makers" finally get of the spotlight: Marie Syrkin and Trude ss-Rosmarin. Marie Syrkin (1899-1988) an independent journalist, poet, Zionist ist and professor of English at Brandeis ersity. Carole Kessner traces her experi- s as a witness to great events, often under nfluence of great men. (Syrkin's early iage to Maurice Samuel was annulled by ather; Samuel and Charles Reznikoff, a husband, are profiled in the book too.)

rude Weiss-Rosmarin (1908-1989) was the nne of Jewish intellectual journalism. She ded and was for 56 years editor of The sh Spectator, the gadfly magazine ahead of me as the only major Jewish publication a woman at the top of its masthead. orah Dash Moore describes her passionate ccupation with Jewish survival as the clysmic events of the Holocaust and the of the State of Israel loomed.

—Naomi Danis

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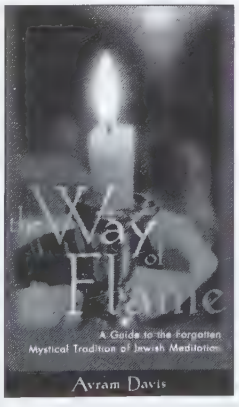

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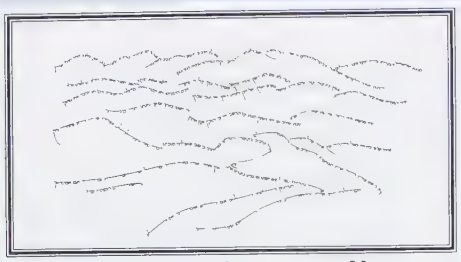

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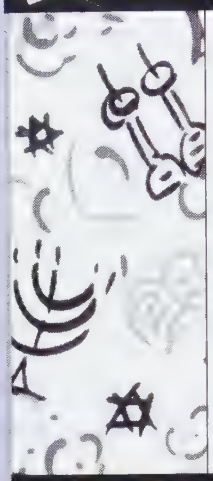

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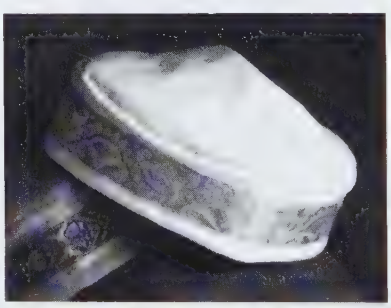

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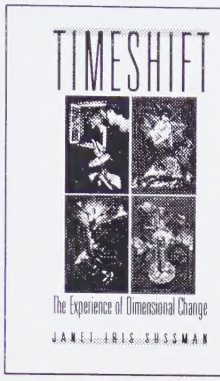

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BIRTH

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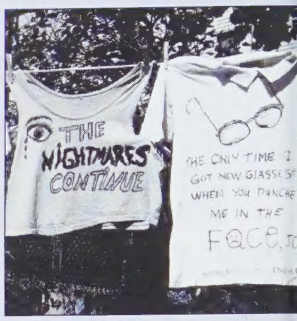
Personal stories about childbearing decisions can cut through political rhetoric and help people understand the need for full reproductive rights. Did you make a reproductive decision in which your faith played a role? Do you have a story of your mother? aunt? grandmother? Ever counseled another woman regarding unintended or unwanted pregnancies? Is there a piece of religious writing which grounds your pro-choice convictions? Include your name, address and religious affiliation if any (anonymous submissions should include state and any religious affiliation). Send to: *Stories and Scripture, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, 1025 Vermont Ave., NW , #1130, Washington, DC 20005; fax (202)628-7716.*

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR ABUSE

The Clothesline Project uses shirts hanging on a clothesline as a vehicle to bear witness to violence against women. Women are asked to create, bring or send shirts, blouses or tee shirts of durable material—white for women who have died of violence, yellow or beige for women who have been battered or assaulted, red, pink or orange for women who have been raped or sexually assaulted, blue or green for women survivors of incest or child sexual abuse, and purple or lavender for women attacked because of their sexual orientation. Since 1990 this project has grown to over 250 displays—nationally and internationally—with an estimated 30,000 shirts. Recent clotheslines have brought



awareness to junior and seni high school students with a of stopping the assumption violence against women and girls is acceptable. The cloth line installations are accomp ied by an audiotape: a gong dicates that a woman is batt every 14 seconds; a whistle minute indicates a rape; a be rings for the 3-4 women kill by their partners every day i the U.S. *The Clothesline Pr National Network, Box 727, Dennis, MA 02641; (508)38 7004; fax (508)385-7011.*

OUT IN THE WILD

"There is hope for a tree" *(Job 14:7)* quotes the English language newsletter of Neot Kedumim, the world's only biblical landscape reserve. Located in central Israel, Neot Kedumim is dedicated to demonstrating and exploring the ties between the biblical tradition and Israel's nature and agriculture—as expressed in prayers, holidays and symbols. Tread on slats to operate an *antilya* (irrigating waterwheel), a metaphor in rabbinic midrash for the ups and downs in life; seek out the new residents, a wild ass, ostrich or oryx—and their respective rabbinic references; eat a biblical breakfast; or stroll the annotated trails of the 625-acre reserve. English language publications available from *American Friends of Neot Kedumim, Steinfeld Rd., Halcott Center, NY 12430; (914)254-5031; fax (914)254-4458;* or get details about visiting from Neot Kedumim *972-8-977-0770; fax 972-8-977-0775; or e-mail nkisrael@shani.net*

YOSSI ESHBOL COURTESY OF NEOT KEDUMIM

The ostrich leaves her eggs on the ground, with only dust to warm them.

A Jewish experience in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming—Each year during late June and July, Rabbi Harry and Robin Levin host Wyoming Jews—and other visitors traveling to nearby Yellowstone Park or the Grand Tetons—who seek a Jewish community, Shabbat experience and kosher cooking. The Levins offer an insider's excursion into the natural beauty and culture of the area—including hiking, fishing, and unusual opportunities to connect with Native Americans. Several programs accomodate families with children during the month of July and additional adventures can be arranged. Details from *Robin Levin, Congregation Beth Elk, 288 North Fork Rd, Lander, WY 82520; (307)332-6363; levinh@sage.edu*

In Portland, Oregon, unaffiliated Jews are welcomed to Jewish living and learning through the leadership, teaching and hospitality of Rabbis Laurie Rutenberg and Gary Schoenberg at Gesher, a nonprofit nondenominational organization devoted to outreach. Their recent Passove calendar included something for everyone: pre-holiday work/parties, a Hametz hunt, myriad seders (feminist, men's adults without children, adults with children over 7, adults with children under 7) and a *maimuna* (Morrocan) concluding celebration. Gesher's newsletter included hints, texts and recipes for a seder at home This program meets an important gap since 70% percent of U.S. Jews do not belong to a synagogue. To participate, or to find out how to bring this idea to your community, contact: *Gesher, 10701 SW 25th Ave., Portland OR 97219; (503)246-5070.*

SEASONS OF THE YEAR & SEASONS OF OUR LIVES

Make the new year sweet and safe. Rosh Hashana greeting cards--a fundraising project since 1986--can help support a volunteer advocate who will work with refugees returning as an organized community to Copan, Guatemala. (Funds are pooled with others in the Witness for Peace Program.) A set of 8 color cards is $10 from *S. F. Jewish Sanctuary Coalition, P.O. Box 411391, San Francisco, CA 94141.*

The whole world is a narrow bridge. The main thing is not to fear.
כל-העולם כלו גשר צר מאד והעיקר לא לפחד כלל
Todo el mundo es un puente angosto. Lo principal es no tener miedo.

Rosh Hashanah Card by Paula Salemme and Teresa Cunniff

One LILITH reader created a weekday morning siddur on the occasion of her adult bat mitzvah. She is happy to share with others interested in preparing materials for similar celebrations. Send $2 to *Jennifer Stein, 228 Spruce Tree Rd., Radnor, PA 19087.* (Be sure to send us a copy of your sample for LILITH's files, also.)

Say *L'Chaim* with a tree. Decorative tree certificates from the Jewish National Fund can serve as invitations or place cards, or be given to each guest as a memento at a bat/bar mitzvah, wedding or other celebration. You can purchase 100 tree certificates at a special price of $750 while helping to repair the devastation from forest fires that destroyed 2 million trees in 1995. Contact *the JNF Department of Education at (800)700-1312.*

Have you ever created a new Jewish ritual? Send in your ritual along with reflections about how it was created and received--for a book to be written by *Vanessa Ochs, c/o CLAL, 99 Park Ave., #300, New York, NY 10016-1599.*

ning the door on elder se is the theme of the final e of AGING Magazine, lished by the U.S. artment of Health and nan Services. The 137-page pendium (#367, 1996) ures articles and resources hysical and emotional se, caretaker neglect, neglect and financial oitation. While the supply , you can request a free from *Dept. G, Aging azine, Administration on g, 330 Independence Ave. Washington, DC 20201.*

HOLARS

award for scholarship in psychology of Jewish nen has been established by family of Kayla Wiener to or her work in the areas of ism, feminism and chology. The $200 annual rd will be judged by a mittee of three members of Jewish Women's Caucus of Association for Women in chology and will be ounced at the annual erican Psychological ociation meeting. Send 4 ies of your theoretical or arch paper or creative project a self addressed postcard by 1 to *Lillian Klempfner, 20 Ventura Blvd., #606, ino, CA 91436.*
tributions to the fund may be to *Jewish Women's Caucus, Julie Allender, 19 Berwyn k, Lebanon, PA 17042.*

Young Scholars in American Religion is a new and expanded program for scholars who have launched their careers within the last seven years. Seminars will take place from early 1997 through the summer of 1998, with four sessions each for historians (led by Deborah Dash Moore), religious studies scholars, sociologists, and seminary professors. Costs for transportation, lodging and meals will be covered. Submit your curriculum vita with three letters of reference and a statement of interest indicating research and teaching activities by September 1, 1996 to *Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis, 425 University Blvd. #344, Indianapolis, IN 46202-5140.*

NEW MEDIA

CommonQuest, The Magazine of Black/Jewish Relations is a joint publication of Howard University and the American Jewish Committee dedicated to "the pursuit of harmony and the discussion of concerns and differences between the African-American and Jewish communities." The editorial advisory board includes Rabbi Rachel Cowan, Hasia Diner, Melissa Fay Greene, Paula Hyman, Nita Lowey, Martha Minow, Deborah Dash Moore, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Anna Deveare Smith and Cynthia Tucker. Subscriptions are free from *CommonQuest, Founders Library #314, Howard University, Washington, DC 20059.*

Blue Jean Magazine For Teen Girls Who Dare "doesn't emphasize how to find a date or get rid of pimples." The premiere issue of this advertising-free publication (March /April 1996) focuses on sports; a column entitled "College Corner" recounts the met (or failed) expectations during freshman year. Freelance teen writers are sought and are paid for work that is accepted. Subscriptions are $39 for 6 bimonthly issues. *Blue Jean Magazine, P.O. Box 90856, Rochester, NY 14609.*

Rachael McClinton as Sarah Wies in *Through the Eyes of A Friend*

HOLOCAUST RELATED

Through the Eyes of a Friend: Fourteen actresses have been trained to play the role of Anne Frank's best friend in a performance piece that includes archival film footage and audience interaction. Rachael and Michael McClinton originally created this production in 1992 and continue to arrange shows in schools and other settings throughout the U.S.A. Contact *Living Voices, 915 E. Pine St. #405, Seattle, WA 98122; (206)328-0798; fax (206)328-4626.*

A bereavement support group for child survivors of the Holocaust who recently experienced the loss of a spouse, sibling or elderly parent, meets at the Hidden Child Foundation, 823 UN Plaza in New York City. For information about particpating--or to ask about starting one in your locale, contact *Carla Lessing at (914)478-0525.*

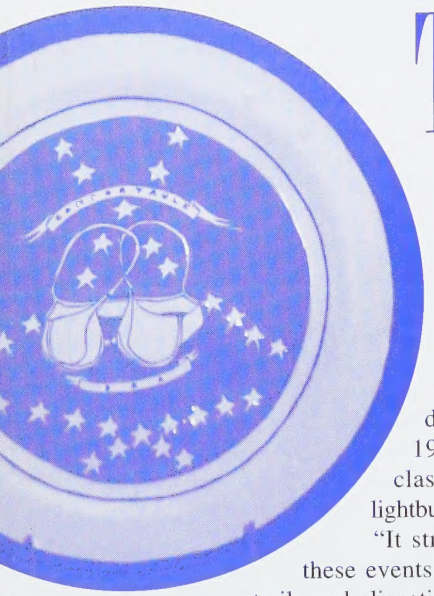
A time capsule of Shanghai refugee life can be found in *Emigranten Adressbuch,* a replica of a volume listing the names, addresses, previous occupations and countries of origin of thousands of German and Austrian Jews who escaped to Shanghai by 1939. $8 post-paid ($10 airmail) from *Tess Johnston, 1375 Huaihai Zhong Lu, #14B, Shanghai 200031, PRC.* The Council of the Jewish Experience in Shanghai is saving documents and locating former Jewish refugees. Contact *Ralph Hirsch, 3500 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-4925.*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

Commemorated

The World According to Me

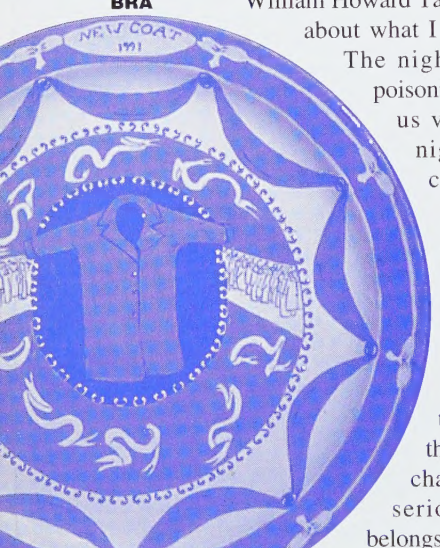
by Susan Schnur



COMFORTABLE BRA

When Sandy Goldberg, a 36-year-old artist living in Cambridge, MA, walked past a "collectibles" shop that was hawking patriotic blue-and-white commemorative ware—plates depicting famous American naval battles, 19th-century political campaigns, neo-classical university buildings, etcetera—a lightbulb went on in her head.

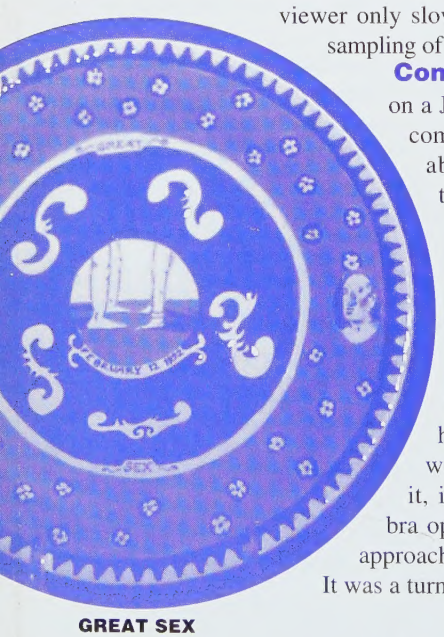
"It struck me how disconnected I felt from these events and objects," she explains. "They felt sterile and alienating to me, and also silly and funny, like William Howard Taft's portrait on a teacup. I started to think about what I would put on a commemorative plate: The night my husband and I both got food poisoning after Chinese dim sum and the two of us vied for prime space at the toilet all night—now that was something worth commemorating."



NEW COAT

After researching the history of commemorative ware at old shipping museums and reading through texts like *American Patriotic and Political China* and *Soviet Porcelains,* Goldberg began her own series of plates, using her life as subject matter. Her conceptual goal was to comment upon the cult of personality that surrounds many artists, as well as to challenge our culture's notion of what is serious and what is prosaic. Plus, what belongs on a dinner plate, anyway?

Goldberg's work uses the formal design elements of the genre, such as elaborate decorative borders, blue and white, and the dating of all events, so that the casual viewer only slowly catches on to the heresy. Here is a sampling of her oeuvre, with annotations by the artist:



GREAT SEX

Comfortable Bra. I based this design on a J.F.K. plate, because when I got my first comfortable bra, after years of complaining about bad bras, it seemed like a great triumph. I was hearing this fanfare like "Stars and Stripes Forever" in the background, and I felt like I was looking up to a great leader, except it was a bra. Actually, my husband bought me this bra for Valentine's Day and it was this underwire thing, the kind of bra that other women wear. I had never checked out this underwire world; anything with the word wire, forget it, it wouldn't work on my body. But this bra opened my eyes, it was a whole different approach to bra-ness, it was like Jewish breasts. It was a turning point in my life.

Pregnancy Test. This is an important momen any woman who goes through it. In the space of a minutes, life gets very intense, your whole world chang don't show the results of the test here, because the test i focus, not the results. The results are too pat—I wante commemorate the ambiguity and the anxiety. In the cent this plate is my urine sample with an actual date on it. I b this design on 19th-century naval victory plates—a so "liquid" motif. The pregnancy test felt to me like a bat regardless of the results you desire, there are two oppo sides: yes/no, win/lose.

Working With Macho Assholes. I worked o art project at a museum in Boston with these guys, and were like bucks, fighting over territory all day long. It worth commemorating! This design shows a buck behind with these ridiculously exaggerated antlers. plate's scalloped decorative border presents a femi contrast. I want my plates to look "correct," so th somebody puts them in their collection of "real" blue- white ware, they won't stand out. That way I surprise pe and they have to deal with it.

An American Jewish Christmas. I know other plate in the world that commemorates a non-hol This is my answer to those annual Christmas plates people collect. In the center is a paper take-out Chinese carton surrounded by a full movie theater showing two c 1950's film scenes—a "car scene" and a "kissing scene." border is Jewish stars and little movie house curtains.

Great Sex. This plate is based on traditional ele campaign ware that shows two running mates in scenes s their lives. Here I replace the election with I show two pairs of naked legs, one pair with sock I did the socks just to make the plate stupider.

Being the Boss. This design derives from an American type of portraiture. I became the boss of this pc and it brought up a lot of mixed emotions for me—bein one giving the orders, wanting people to work har associated that role with someone else, and it was complicated to have that person be me. I took the role extreme and painted myself in this Presidential portrait.

Getting a Grant. I got this art grant to make plates and I was so overjoyed that I decided to com orate it with a plate. The center image is a suit of a because you feel so armed and powerful when you grant. The annunciation angels, the ones who told Mar would bear a child, are annointing me and announcin triumphal event.

Goldberg's plates, including "Food Poisoning," "New Coat," and a Half Hour Flight Delay with a Baby," "Visiting Fam the Holidays," and others, are available through the artis Franklin St. #224, Cambridge, MA 02139; (617)621-9 Comments Goldberg, "Women understand my work immed Men seem to draw a blank."